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HAZARD
OF THE
SNOWS
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A HAZARD . . .
OF THE SNOWS

OTHER POPULAR NOVELS

BY

OTTWELL BINNS

PUBLISHED BY

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED,

in various editions.


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THE LADY OF NORTH STAR
THE MYSTERY OF THE HEART
A MATING IN THE WILDS
THE LOVE THAT BELIEVETH
THE LIFTING OF THE SHADOW
THE WHITE HANDS OF JUSTICE
THE TREASURE OF CHRISTOPHE

A HAZARD OF THE SNOWS

By
OTTWELL BINNS

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

1922



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A HAZARD OF THE SNOWS .

CHAPTER I

THE SPIDER'S PARLOUR

MR. JESSE APPELYARD sat in his comfortably furnished office, with a very thoughtful look upon his face. A heavy gross man, he did not in the least resemble a spider, yet into this particular parlour many flies found their way, and once in the toils, struggled vainly for release. For though Mr. Appleyard called himself a financier and insurance broker, he was in fact a money-lender with a voracity beyond that of many spiders, preying upon the young and ingenuous who desired to anticipate the golden future.

On the desk before him lay a number of documents; two of them were insurance policies, one was a copy of a will from Somerset House, and the rest were plainly promissory notes. He gazed at the last, then took up a small leather-bound book, and turned over the pages until he found the one he wanted. He considered it for a moment, then he frowned darkly.

"So," he grunted aloud, "I stand to lose eleven thousand pounds and all but the surrender value of the policies! Um! Well, we will see."

He rose from his chair, and going to the window, looked thoughtfully down into the roaring tide of Piccadilly. Then he spoke again.

"Not if I know it! I'm not going to be dished that way."

Any of Mr. Appleyard's friends hearing the words and seeing the look upon his face would have agreed that there was little likelihood of the said "dishing" taking place. He was a resolute man, hampered by no scruples, and if he said he was not going to be dished—well! he was not going to be, and there was an end of the matter. There was a look of quite savage determination upon his face as he stared down into the street, and the frown above his cold blue eyes was very marked. Then suddenly the frown lightened a little, and the determined look gave place to a sneering smile.

"The coxcomb!"

He was watching a man who was crossing the street; a man dressed in the extreme of fashion, elegant with the elegance to which some men seem born, and sporting the single eyeglass much more popular a few years ago than now. The man was perhaps fifty years of age, but he stepped jauntily, and took the risk of a passing taxi-cab with an aplomb that made the chauffeur fling an oath at him. The money-lender smiled again as he witnessed the incident.

"A cool one!" he said. "I wonder what he'll have to say on the business!"

He turned from the window and again seated himself at the desk, where he fingered a paper-knife whilst he awaited the announcement of his expected visitor. An electric bell whirled in the outer office, then came a knock, and the door of Mr. Appleyard's private office opened.

"Major Andover to see you, sir."

"Show him in!" was the brusque reply.

A moment later, the man, whose passage across the street he had witnessed, entered the room, and as the door closed behind him, with a quiet deliberate-

ness he set his hat and stick on one chair, and planted himself in another, then he looked at the financier.

"Morning, Appleyard !"

"Morning, Major," replied the money-lender in a tone that was scarcely cordial.

Major Andover's eyebrows tilted slightly at the other's tone, then he smiled. "Got your note," he said genially. "Business, I suppose?"

"Yes, business," grunted the other. "I've been expecting you for the last seven weeks. That's why I wrote you yesterday."

"Been abroad," replied the Major tersely. "Paris, Monte, and Rome ! A paying trip, Young Phillpots has the shekels, you know."

"I don't know, and I don't want to know. What I do know is that you haven't got 'em."

"Oh !" said the Major with a carelessness that was more apparent than real. "You've heard about the will, then."

"I've a copy of it here," replied Appleyard, flicking the document in question with the paper-knife. "It's gay reading for a man to whom you owe eleven thousand pounds."

"So much as that," said the Major with an air of surprise. "I shouldn't have thought it. But I daresay you're right, Appleyard. I never knew you make a mistake—yet."

"I made a bad one—when I took up you," replied Appleyard, with sudden exasperation.

"No. I assure you, no, Appleyard," replied Major Andover quickly, with a deprecatory wave of the hand. "Your instinct did not mislead you ; your judgment was quite sound. I am not one of your bad eggs, believe me."

"But this will——"

"Yes, that will," interrupted the Major. "The

old man's last literary effort ! It's a corker if you judge by appearances."

"I don't know any other way to judge a will," said the money-lender sharply.

"And yet, my dear Appleyard, appearances are ever deceptive. That will, I believe, directs that to me two hundred pounds per annum shall be paid out of my late father's estate ; to keep me from the workhouse, as the old man benevolently expresses it——"

"Yes, and eight hundred a year to that young Neil Musgrave whom Endicott brought here a few months back."

"Endicott ! H'm ! yes ! He brought him, but I—er—arranged for him to be brought."

"That's neither here nor there," said Appleyard impatiently. "The point is that there is something like twenty thousand pounds per annum to which you should have been heir which is left to the absolute discretion of trustees to be dealt with according to certain expressed wishes of the testator."

"That, I believe, is so !"

Mr. Appleyard looked at his visitor. The handsome, dissipated face showed no sign of perturbation, and he was a little puzzled by the attitude of a man who could so calmly face what seemed to him a misfortune. Then a light broke on him.

"Ah !" he said. "You mean to contest the will ?"

"That would be no good," replied the Major, "or at least so I am assured by a very eminent counsel. Besides, there is no need !"

"No need ! Man, do you mean to say that you can afford to let twenty thousand a year go by you on the other side of the street ?"

"Frankly, I can't," answered the Major with a smile, "and I am surprised that you should ask

the question, Appleyard. You, of all men, ought to know without asking. But the truth is that I mean that money to come my side of the street. See ? ”

“ I’m blowed if I do ! ”

“ No ! But when I put you wise you will, at least, I hope so.”

“ Then you know something ? ”

“ Enough to keep me from losing my head over that two hundred pounds per annum ! ” replied the Major airily.

The money-lender looked at him, wondered for a moment if he were bluffing, then dismissed the idea from his mind. The Major really was of serene mind ; and assured that he would not be that without reason, Mr. Appleyard himself began to feel more comfortable. “ Suppose you unfold the mystery, Major ? ” he said in a more affable tone.

The Major smiled, took out a cigarette case, and for a moment hesitated between a Turkish and an Egyptian. Finally he chose the latter and, well aware of Appleyard’s impatience, tapped it with slow deliberation on the case. Then he lit it, and leaned back in the chair.

“ I have always thought that the Intelligence Department of the British War Office was sadly neglected and held in light esteem. If you want to be able to meet the machinations of an enemy, you must know all——”

“ What in thunder has this to do with what we are discussing, Andover ? ” broke in the money-lender impatiently.

“ It is the expression of a settled conviction of mine,” replied the Major airily. “ It is a mistake not to have your spies in the opposite camp, and it is a mistake I have been careful not to fall into. When, on the old man’s stern decree, I left the

ancestral roof for good and all, I took care to leave one friend behind me, in the person of old William, the family butler. A good sort, old William, though an awfully bad penman. He was the one creature who yearned for my return, and he did what he could for me. Knowing how the exile hungers for news of home, he kept me informed of what went forward; and when a few months before his lamented death my respected parent made the will of which you have the copy there, William was in the room. He heard the expressed wishes of the testator, and was one of the witnesses to a document in which these wishes were embodied for the guidance of the trustees. He communicated them to me in his usual execrable handwriting——”

“Ah! then you know what lies behind the will?”

“With the exception of William and the trustees, I believe I am the only person who has that knowledge. It is a position of some strategic value, and shows the wisdom of leaving your spies behind when forced to retreat.”

Mr. Appleyard thoughtfully tapped the desk with the paper-knife, then he looked at his visitor.

“Then things are better than the will would lead one to suppose?”

“I think so, yes; I think so, though it is not every one who would agree with me.”

“Oh,” cried the money-lender impatiently, “have done with this confounded beating about. Spit out what you know, Andover, and let me judge if it is worth anything to us.”

Major Andover smiled at the other's impatience, noted the look of expectancy upon his face, and smiled again. Then he explained.

“Well, the secret instructions to the trustees are

that on his reaching his twenty-seventh birthday the income of the estate, with the exception of the two hundred pounds payable to me, is to go to the testator's grandson and my nephew, Neil Musgrave."

"Great Scot! And you think that that is a cause for congratulation, that——"

"Frankly I do not," interrupted the Major. "But you haven't heard all. There are conditions to my respected nephew's inheritance. On his twenty-seventh natal day it must be shown that he is not in debt, that he is living a sober and regular life and that he is diligently following some profession. Now do you understand?"

"A little," replied Appleyard, and then whistled softly. "I begin to see the reason for some things now. You said just now that you arranged for Endicott to bring young Musgrave here——"

"Exactly! I knew that if he once came here he would be likely to—er—remain in your hands until, well . . . you know you always do collar the whole fleece, Appleyard!" The Major laughed as he made the imputation, and then continued: "Anyway, he is likely to be in debt, when the day of fate strikes. And as for the other conditions, well, I've arranged very nicely for them, I think, or rather Endicott has."

Mr. Jesse Appleyard quoted the words he had recently heard: "A sober and regular life! But, Andover, young Musgrave doesn't drink. Any one can see that with half an eye——"

"Drink!" Major Andover laughed. "Appleyard, you are quite old-fashioned. The modern buck does not look upon the wine when it is red, he prefers the tabloid and the needle——"

"Phew! Drugs!"

The Major nodded. "I have known a man drink and follow a profession pretty steadily. But given

sufficient time the tabloid and the hypodermic syringe, or the tabloid alone, will sap the strongest will. And I have time—thirteen whole months before the trustees make their decision. By then”—a sudden fierce note came in the Major's voice—“I'll present them with young Musgrave's soul on a charger. And if they don't shudder at the spectacle——”

He broke off without finishing the sentence. There was a ferocious gleam in his eyes, and marking it, Mr. Appleyard knew that the Major's calm acceptance of his father's will was no more than a mask, hiding a desperate determination. He considered the situation for a moment, then he offered a comment.

“You have laid your plans well. Am I right in supposing that if young Musgrave fails to qualify, then you——”

“No! At least not directly. If Neil Musgrave doesn't come up to standard, then the money is to be paid to my daughter!”

“To your daughter? Why, man, I didn't know you had a——”

“I haven't.” The Major gave a short laugh. “That's the cream of the situation. I had a daughter, and the governor knew of her; but his intelligence department was at fault. My daughter died when she was three years old. I never saw her myself, as I was serving in India when she was born, and she was dead when I came home to find that my wife refused even to see me again. It was rough luck on a domestic fellow like me, but I survived it; and now I begin to reap in joy. I have no daughter; so she can't inherit; and given Musgrave fails to qualify, who is there to inherit but——”

“Your father made no further arrangements for the disposition of the property?”

"None! He banked on these two."

"Then if things go well, you——"

"If?" Again there was the fierce note in the Major's voice. "There's no if about it! They've got to go well, man."

Mr. Appleyard nodded. "I agree with you on that," he replied thoughtfully. "But, of course, there are contingencies to be considered, and it is no use shutting one's eyes to them. Suppose young Musgrave pulls up?"

"He won't!" said the Major emphatically.

"But he might," persisted the money-lender, "and if he does you're out in the cold, Major. The situation has its risks."

"Then the risks are for my beloved nephew!" replied Major Andover with a meaning laugh.

Mr. Appleyard sat without speaking for a little time. His eye wandered to the desk and in its survey took in the leather-bound book, the promissory notes and the policies. His gaze rested on the last for a moment, then he spoke with a quiet deliberation that was almost terrible.

"Twenty thousand a year! It is a very respectable income. If I were in your place, Major, I should not take any chances. I should put my money on a certainty."

"What do you mean, Appleyard?"

There was something in the directness of the question which disconcerted the financier. He laughed a little confusedly, and then, as his visitor waited for an answer, gave a non-committal one.

"Well, you see, your scheme, though a good one, has a flaw. If Musgrave should reform—where are you? And remember that is always possible. He hasn't gone the pace—much. He's not personally extravagant and the card debts that brought him here——"

"I arranged those, through Endicott!" broke in the Major.

"Yes? But you haven't arranged any more, have you? Musgrave is a youth whom it's a pleasure to meet. Since he came that particular cropper he hasn't touched a card, so Endicott tells me; and I can tell you this—he meets the instalments of the loan as they fall due. He is, I understand, qualifying as a civil engineer; and what with one thing and the other, so far as I can see, there's only one strand in the cord that you hope to hang him with."

"It's a strong one," said the Major quickly, "and it grows stronger every day."

"Nevertheless, it may break," said Mr. Appleyard stubbornly.

The Major shook his head and gave a short laugh as he uttered unquestionable truth: "Cocaine is the deuce of a thing to play with."

"True, but it's as well to consider all the contingencies. Suppose he pulls up? What has happened in relation to the cards may be repeated in this matter of the drug. He finds the dose getting hold of him—or a new interest comes into his life—say a girl, where are you then? Up a tree, and a very tall tree at that."

Major Andover looked black. There was, as he recognised, much truth in what the financier urged. It was a full minute before he spoke, and when he did so the tone of his words gave them a significance far beyond their connotation.

"There are other ways left."

"Exactly," said Appleyard with alacrity. "I thought you would see that." He met the Major's eyes for a moment, then he looked away, and spoke with slow deliberation. "The question is whether the other ways are not better. This young man is,

I understand, very fond of motor-cycling. Well, there is something very convincing about a motor accident. When a man habitually exceeds the speed limit his friends are not surprised when one fine day they hear that he has broken his neck."

"I wish to blazes he would," broke out the Major stormily. "The sooner the better."

"Exactly!" said the money-lender in a dry tone.

Again the gaze of the men met, and in the eyes of both there was the light of complete understanding.

"As you say," said the Major in a hoarse voice, "there is something very convincing about a motor accident."

"If it is—er—final."

"Yes!"

"Then perhaps it would be as well to consider the a—a—arrangements carefully?"

"No time like the present," answered the Major with conviction.

At that answer the money-lender set down the paper-knife, rose from his chair, and with a light step surprising in so gross a man, crossed the room to his outer office, and opened the door quickly. Looking round, Major Andover saw the clerk bending over a ledger at a table, apparently quite engrossed in his work. Mr. Appleyard nodded to himself. In the time it had taken to open the door the clerk could not possibly have reached the table if he had been eavesdropping. But he trusted no man, least of all his servant, and he proceeded to make assurance doubly sure.

"There are those circulars that want typing, Tarvin; you had better start on them. They must get away by the evening post."

"Yes, sir," said the clerk obediently.

Appleyard closed the door again, and from a

cabinet took out a box of cigars, a whisky decanter and a syphon.

"Help yourself, Major," he said genially. "I'm on the water wagon just now—rheumatic gout, you know, but that's no reason why you——"

He ended with a laugh and a wave of his hand. The Major helped himself, liberally as to the whisky, sparingly from the syphon, then as the click-click of the typewriter sounded from the outer office the money-lender leaned forward in his chair.

"Now," he said, "we can talk—safely."

But though the monotonous click of the typewriter was the assurance that none listened outside the closed door, their conversation was in whispers, and both wore the furtive look of men engaged in plotting some evil thing.

CHAPTER II

THE SILVER BOX

MISS BETTY MARLOWE was improving the shining hours. It is true that their radiance was that of electric lamps, but when the lamps are lighting a fancy dress ball which has been entered upon with spirit and thoroughness, they may make the hours bright enough for any youthful spirit. From her place halfway down the long room she surveyed the mimic pageant of the ages, her brown eyes dancing with delight, her fair cheeks a little flushed with the excitement of a new experience. By her side stood a middle-aged lady who from her dress belonged to the court of William the Norman, but who in modern, well-clipped English commented upon the various characters in the room.

"That man there—the Earl of Leicester by his

raiment—is Sir John Harkness, the criminal lawyer. He will be a judge when his party gets into power. The lady with him who looks as if she might have stepped out of one of Watteau's pictures is his sister."

"She is very beautiful!" said Betty, ungrudging in her admiration.

"Well——" Miss Marlowe's companion broke off and laughed. "You do not need to envy any one in this gallery, Betty. There are not many who could hold a candle to you."

At this frank testimony to her *beaux yeux* Betty flushed divinely. "Auntie, you are too generous in your praise! You think——"

"I can believe my eyes, which is more than some people can, apparently," said the older woman with a sudden edge to her tone.

"What on earth do you mean, auntie?" asked the girl wonderingly.

Her aunt did not reply, but following the older woman's gaze, the girl encountered the eyes of a man, who was dressed as the Laughing Cavalier. But just now he was not laughing. On his face was a half-doubting, half-incredulous look, and his eyes were fixed upon her in a stare that was almost rude.

"Ah!" she said, turning to her aunt, "you mean that cavalier there. Who is he, auntie? Does he know you?"

"Yes," answered the Norman lady grimly. "And he thinks he knows you, but cannot believe his eyes."

"But who is he?"

"His name is Andover. It is many years since I saw him before, and he was a captain in the Guards then; what he is now I cannot presume to say. Let us move on. He is not a nice man."

She did not look at the Cavalier again, but moved

on up the long room, her niece accompanying her. For his part Major Andover stared after them with frowning eyes, a perplexed look upon his face. A moment later the look lightened, as the path of the two ladies was barred by a scarlet Mephistopheles.

"Ah," he thought to himself, "Maurice Endicott! He knows them. He will be able to tell me——"

He moved to a point from which he could keep an eye upon the trio. Evidently Maurice Endicott was on good terms with the two ladies, for he stood with them laughing and chatting, and presently, as the music of the Blue Danube Waltz sounded from behind a screen of palms, he offered his arm to Miss Marlowe, and a moment later they were dancing. Major Andover watched them a little while, then once more gave his attention to the lady in the Norman dress. She was chatting with a granite-faced man, attired as a *Courrier-du-bois*, and who from pictures that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers, he easily recognised as a Canadian statesman of distinction. His eyes wandered round the room again seeking Betty Marlowe and her partner. The dance was ending when he found them, and he watched them walk towards the girl's chaperone. When they reached her the young man stood for a little while, laughing and talking gaily with Miss Betty, who on the evident request of Endicott presently produced her dance card. With interested eyes Andover saw his acquaintance write on the card, then as the young man turned in the direction of the buffet he himself moved forward to intercept him, and in the course of half a minute placed himself directly in the other's path.

"Hallo, Major!" said the young man in some surprise. "I didn't expect——"

"No," broke in the Major with a laugh. "I

daresay not. I came here just to keep in touch, you know." He stopped, glanced backward, and then quite casually asked, "By the by, who were those people you were with just now, Endicott? I don't seem to know them."

The very faintest shade of annoyance showed on the young man's face at the question, and a slight reluctance manifested itself in his reply. "Daresay you don't, Major. They come from the Dominion, and the elder lady—Mrs. Cathcart—is a friend of my mater's."

"Canada—hey? And the girl, who is she?"

"Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Cathcart's niece."

"Oh, is that so?"

There was a diminution of the Major's interest. He had got the information that he sought, and it meant nothing to him. Quite deliberately he turned the subject. "Seen anything of Musgrave lately?"

At this further question a look of malevolence came on Endicott's face, and it was very clear that he was not friendly to the man in question. "Yes," he said slowly, "I saw him this morning. Thought he might have been here to-night. Indeed, I am surprised that he is not."

"Some special lodestone here then, hey?" asked the Major carelessly.

"You have seen her," answered Endicott shortly

"Miss Marlowe?"

"Yes, confound him!"

The Major's face grew suddenly very thoughtful. He remembered the contingencies of which Appleyard had spoken, and here, as it seemed, was the most likely and the most powerful one of all.

"So!" he said softly. "So!" Then he looked at Endicott. "We can't allow that to go on. It wouldn't be at all fair to that exceedingly pretty girl."

"You can leave that to me," replied the younger man quickly. "I have my own interests to serve."

"Oh! Musgrave is trespassing on your preserves, is he?" The Major laughed as he asked the question, then continued: "Well, I can't blame you if you make him get out. He's too pretty a shot to be allowed to poach in one's own coverts."

"I'll clear him out," retorted Endicott shortly. "Depend on me."

"I shall, my dear fellow. You know it wouldn't at all suit the books of a mutual friend of ours for Musgrave to—a—well, marry an heiress. I suppose Miss Marlowe is an heiress, or you——"

"She will have a little money," interrupted Endicott brusquely.

"Then, my dear chap, I hope you will secure it for yourself. But I should take no risks from Musgrave. If he gets in your way, squash him ruthlessly. None but the brave deserve the fair—and the spoils you know. Au revoir! I think I'll go to my club and dress myself in sanity and the garb of modernity once more. I have had my fill of this. But you might let me hear how the affair prospers. I am rather interested to know which of you will prove the better man."

"Oh, you shall hear, Major," answered Endicott, "but you can wager on it that Musgrave won't be allowed to spoil my pitch."

"Then ask me to the wedding," laughed the Major and went his way.

An hour later, in the smoking-room at his club, he sat considering the news which he had heard. He found it rather disturbing, and he wondered how Maurice Endicott would deal with the situation that jeopardised the plan for Neil Musgrave's ruin. The course that the former might follow was not clear to him, but he found some satisfaction in the

reflection that this rivalry between the two men would make Endicott a more ruthless tool in the hands of Appleyard and himself. His thoughts wandered a little and he found himself visioning Miss Marlowe's face. A sombre look came in his eyes.

"She was wonderfully like Margot," he whispered to himself. "A family resemblance, I suppose."

He sat there for quite a long time, thinking of things that he seldom permitted himself to consider, taking stock of his past life and of certain events of years long gone. Apparently the exercise was not a pleasant one, for a black look came on his face, and the sombreness in his eyes grew more pronounced. Then an oath that was no more than an expression of impatience slipped from him.

"Oh, hang!" he whispered, and rising abruptly from his seat, he went in search of company that would be more congenial to him than his own thoughts, for the Major was one of those very numerous class of men who in the society of others find the sole possible escape from themselves.

And about that time Maurice Endicott led Miss Betty Marlowe to a secluded seat in a small conservatory which opened from the ball-room. The girl having expressed the wish to cut the dance Endicott had eagerly agreed, clutching at the opportunity thus afforded him, and when they were seated, he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet.

"I'm awfully glad you decided to give that dance the go-by, Miss Marlowe," he began lightly. "At these affairs the Lancers becomes a perfect scrum."

"Too strenuous for you?" laughed Betty. "I shouldn't have thought you would have minded."

"I don't really," he answered, laughing back, "I'm as strenuous as the age demands. But there is something I want to say to you, and somehow I

have never been able to find the opportunity until this moment."

He stopped and looked at Betty as if for encouragement. The girl's eyes met his quite frankly, and it was clear to him that she had no anticipation of his purpose. She laughed pleasantly as she replied: "You make me quite curious, Mr. Endicott. Do go on. I want to hear."

"Betty, I want you to marry me."

As he dropped this bombshell, the girl started, her face flushed rosilily, then almost as suddenly paled, and she began to speak, impulsively.

"Oh, but, Mr. Endicott, I—I——" She stopped and began again. "I did not know you were thinking of that. I had no idea that you—that you——"

"That I loved you? No! Perhaps not. But all the same it is the truth. Since the first moment of our meeting on the *Olympic* I have known it, and have burned to tell you of it, and now I have done so."

Betty Marlowe sat there silent, in some confusion, her delicate hands playing with the chain girdle that was part of her costume. The man looked at her and found encouragement from her confusion.

"I hope I am not making a mistake in thinking that you——"

"Oh," interrupted Betty quickly, this time anticipating his words, "but I am afraid you are."

A quick frown came on Endicott's face. "But," he said, "you like me? We have always been friends——"

"Friends, yes," she said, "but there is a great difference between friendship and—and——" She did not finish the sentence, but left him to infer what went unspoken.

"Yes, I know," Endicott responded smoothly. "I have already explained that I have loved you from the first moment of our acquaintance. And it is that I plead. The knowledge that I——"

"Please, please, Mr. Endicott," broke in the girl, "I do not want to argue. I do not feel able. I must think over what you have said to me. I——"

"That is the utmost I hoped for to-night," he said suavely, as her voice faltered. "And I am grateful to you for that mercy. I can only hope that on reflection you will see with me. I shall build upon that hope——"

"Oh, but you must not!" cried Betty quickly.

"But I shall," he said with an emphatic note of determination. "You must allow me to hope, that is the suppliant's privilege always."

To this the girl made no reply. A little gasp of relief came from her, and she rose swiftly from her seat. Looking down the green aisle of palms, Endicott saw a young man standing idly watching the dancers in the room beyond. His face was pale, his fine dark eyes had an unnatural brilliance, his black hair crisped in curls, and whilst his mobile mouth seemed to betoken indecision this was belied by the firm line of the jaw. Tall and lissom, he made a handsome figure of a man in the courtier's suit of dark velvet that he wore; but as Endicott's eyes fell on him, he frowned heavily.

"Mr. Endicott, there is some one waiting for me, I promised——"

"You mean Neil Musgrave there," said Endicott, rising and nodding his head in the direction of the waiting man.

"Yes. He——"

"He is a great friend of yours, is he not?" asked Endicott harshly. "There is no need for you to reply," he said, as the quick blood ran into Miss

Marlowe's face. "I know he is, and I have sometimes wondered if you were wise to permit that friendship."

"Mr. Endicott, what *do* you mean?" asked the girl in swift wonder. "I thought Mr. Musgrave and you were friends."

"So we are, but a man may permit a friendship that is undesirable for a girl."

Betty Marlowe's beautiful face assumed a look of severity that surprised her companion. "You have said too much or too little, Mr. Endicott. I do not understand in the least what you are hinting at. I think you ought to explain."

"There is no necessity for me to do that," replied the young man with a sudden harsh laugh. "I think I would rather leave that to Neil Musgrave himself. But I will give you a hint. Ask him what is in the little silver box that he carries about with him——"

"The little silver box!"

As she echoed the words, a look came on Betty Marlowe's face that Endicott did not in the least understand. He looked at her wonderingly, then strove to deepen whatever impression he had made.

"Yes, the silver box from which he never parts, which I will wager a thousand pounds he has it about him at this moment."

"Can you afford to lose so much money at once?" asked the girl quickly.

"I would not mind risking it on a certainty," laughed Endicott carelessly.

"Well, you have my assurance that you would lose," replied Betty quietly. "And now take me to Mr. Musgrave."

Her manner permitted of no other course, and as she moved forward, Maurice Endicott fell into step by her side. There was a puzzled frown on his

face, and he was wondering whether his crooked stroke had been parried by circumstances of which he was in ignorance. He could not understand the situation. That the girl was not ignorant of the existence of the silver box he was convinced; that she understood the significance of its contents he did not believe; and just before they reached the waiting man, at the risk of doing his own cause irreparable injury, he opened the matter afresh by whispering hurriedly: "The silver box holds Musgrave's secret—a secret that sooner or later destroys all friendships. If you value yours, it would be as well to learn the secret."

Betty Marlowe's only reply was a quick look, half wonder, half indignation, and the next moment Neil Musgrave, becoming aware of their presence, hurried forward.

"Ah, Betty, at last! I thought you had forgotten."

"No," answered the girl. "I do not forget my friends."

She glanced at Endicott as she spoke, and the latter knew that her words were an implied rebuke to himself. He was not disturbed by it, however. He knew that the girl's curiosity had been awakened, that it would conjecture what was in the silver box, that sooner or later it would endeavour to arrive at exact knowledge, and whether the information came from Musgrave or from himself did not greatly matter; it was sufficient that once the girl was in possession of it, it must inevitably place Musgrave outside the circle of her regard. Convinced of this, he took his leave of them with a light heart, leaving them standing together.

Betty looked at her new cavalier with eyes that were the more friendly, because of the unfriendly hints that she had listened to.

"Neil," she said a little anxiously, "you do not look well."

"My nerves!" explained the young man quickly, "I find this kind of thing a little trying. If I had not hoped to meet you here, I should not have come. Need we go into that hot room immediately, Betty?"

"I have no wish to," answered the girl with a smile.

Together they turned back into the conservatory, and presently were sitting side by side, talking with an intimacy that proved their friendship was very close indeed. And so it came about that for the second time within half an hour Betty Marlowe learned that she was desirable in the eyes of men, and listened to a proposal that made her heart beat quicker, that brought the bright blood to her cheek and a soft radiance to her eyes. She listened in a silence that was without any discouragement, and Neil Musgrave went on.

"I have eight hundred pounds a year, and no doubt before long I shall secure a decent appointment in my profession. Before I met you I was thinking of India, but perhaps you would not care for the East, Betty, as your home is in the West? I have always dreamed of the East, but——"

How it happened Betty Marlowe could never explain. She had meant never to notice the hints that Endicott had given, though curiosity was strong within her; but the mention of the East somehow conjured before her mental vision the picture of a small silver box on the lid of which was a Chinese dragon. Before she was aware of it, the question slipped out.

"That silver box of yours came from the East, did it not, Neil?"

The effect of her quite irrelevant question was

amazing. Checked in the very midst of his words, her companion's face went ghastly pale. A look of utter consternation came in his eyes, and it was a moment before he replied, and then stammeringly :

"My . . . my silver box?"

"Yes. You left it in my aunt's drawing-room two days ago. I have it at home."

His demeanour puzzled her. It was clear that her mention of the box had dismayed him, and suddenly, formless suspicions, born of hints so recently heard, rose in her mind, bringing with them a sense of threatened evil. As he sat there dumb, they gathered strength, and with a flashing look of anxiety she asked :

"What is the matter, Neil? Why should my mention of your box disturb you so?"

"I—I—left it at—your aunt's?" stammered Musgrave evasively.

"You did!" answered the girl with simple directness. "And the odd thing is that I was told to-night that you never parted with it." She broke off, and gave a little uneasy laugh. "Some one was willing to wager a thousand pounds that you had it with you to-night, but of course I knew that it was not so."

"Maurice Endicott!" exclaimed Musgrave hoarsely.

"Yes." The girl paused, then she added quietly, "He told me to ask you what was the secret of that box."

Having spoken, she looked down, waiting for an answer; then, as it did not come, her eyes lifted and fixed themselves on the white, handsome face by her side. There was an expression of despair upon it, and a brooding, sombre look in the dark eyes. Then the young man broke out, suddenly, in hoarse, whispering tones :

"Yes!" he said. "Yes! It is only right that you should know. The secret of that box is cocaine."

"Cocaine!" Betty Marlowe was puzzled, then in a flash comprehension came to her. "Oh, Neil, do you mean that you—that you——"

"Yes," he laughed mirthlessly, as he answered the unfinished question. "I am what is usually styled a victim of the drug habit."

Betty Marlowe's face lost all its delicate colouring, and indexed feelings of deep dismay, whilst her eyes were wells of pity.

"Oh, Neil!" she whispered brokenly. "I never thought that you——"

"No, I daresay not. It is only lately that I made the discovery how the thing had got hold of me. I meant to pull up. I should have done so, if you—if you, Betty, had agreed to—to——"

"No!" broke in Betty, with a sudden flash of wisdom. "You would not. Men are not so saved from anything, Neil. They have to work out their own salvation. There is no other way."

Neil Musgrave sat for what seemed quite a long time without speaking, then he said, "Perhaps you are right, Betty, but it—it would have helped."

"Perhaps," answered the girl. "I do not know. There are risks that every girl takes when she gives herself into a man's keeping; but this is a risk that no girl should take. I am sure of that."

"You are right, of course, Betty," he replied quietly. "But—oh, it's no use talking. Shall I take you to your aunt?"

Betty rose to her feet. Her eyes were full of anguish and her beautiful face was very wan, but her little mouth and chin were very firm. She knew that she loved this man, but the fact that he was unworthy steeled her against him and made her almost hard.

"No!" she answered. "Please do not come. I will go alone." She moved forward a step, then remembered something. "Your box," she said tentatively, "shall I send it, or——"

"Throw the cursed thing in the fire!" cried Neil Musgrave brokenly.

"Very well!" answered Betty, and continued on her way, whilst the man she left watched her depart with despairing eyes.

But the dragon-lidded box did not go in the fire, after all; for when she reached home, the girl found a transcribed telephone message awaiting her.

"Do not destroy the box. Keep it. I will call for it, perhaps to-morrow, certainly before the end of the week."

And having read the message in the solitude of her own room, Betty, who knew that she had been hard but not unjust, gave way to sudden tears.

CHAPTER III

A FAREWELL

THREE days later Neil Musgrave made his promised call, and was received by Betty Marlowe in her aunt's drawing-room. As the servant ushered him in, the girl gave him one quick glance, and saw that he was very pale. His dark eyes seemed to have a dull film, there were signs of tension on his face and a nervous twitching of the mobile lips. The girl was shocked at the change in him, and afraid to trust herself to ask after his health, she said, with an abruptness that was almost startling: "You have come for your silver box?"

"Yes," he answered stonily.

"I was expecting you," she replied. "I have it here." She thrust her hand into a little work-basket full of ribbons and silks, and producing the dragon-lidded box held it out to him. For the moment he made no motion to take it, but stared at it as it lay in her delicate hand, and Betty also looked at it, thinking how small a thing could sunder two human lives. Then he spoke, with abrupt eagerness.

"You have sealing wax in the house?"

"Of course," she answered wonderingly. "Why do you ask?"

"And those are your ribbons? You can spare a little piece?"

"The basketful if it is any use to you," she answered, puzzled by a change in his manner, and the eager light which had come into his dark eyes.

"Oh, a little will do," he answered. "Half a yard at most."

Still puzzled, Betty took up a dainty pair of silver-handled scissors and snipped off a generous half-yard of ribbon, holding it out to him.

"No," he said, "I would rather your hands did it."

Betty was more puzzled than ever. "I am afraid I do not understand," she said wonderingly. "If you will explain——"

"I want you to tie up that box—and to seal it——" he answered briefly.

"Oh!" she cried. "I did not understand. I—I——" She broke off without finishing her thought, and in some confusion began to wind the narrow ribbon round the box, tying it in a firm bow. Then she looked up.

"You want me to seal it?" she asked.

"If you will—thank you."

"I shall have to find the wax," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, and then excusing herself left the room. In two or three minutes she returned, carrying a lighted taper, a stick of wax, and a large old-fashioned seal. Without a word she proceeded to melt the scented violet wax, and having sealed the box, extinguished the taper, and gravely handed the box to him. He took it with thanks, and rose from his chair as if to go. Then the girl cried out, protestingly :

"But what are you going to do, Neil? You have a plan, I am sure. Tell me. I want to know."

"I am going away," he said quietly.

"Yes," she nodded. "I think you are wise to do that. You are going to—to fight."

"No," he answered, with a quick flash of the dark eyes. "I am going away to conquer."

"Yes! Yes! But tell me——"

"I have had a consultation with Sir Robert Hardcastle, the nerve specialist, you know. I put my case to him frankly; but what he recommended did not greatly appeal to me."

"What did he advise?" asked Betty quickly.

"Oh, he recommended me to place myself under restraint for a time, to enter a home where such cases as mine are treated. That did not commend itself to me at all. Then he told me of a man who won out of the mess that I am in by joining a Trappist monastery as a lay brother; but seeing I had no fancy for anything of the sort, he said that the best thing that remained was a life of action in places where drugs were unobtainable. He thought that a year of such a life, with abstinence, would put me right."

"And you are going to the life of action?" asked the girl quickly.

"Yes," he answered simply, "I am going to a life that will be full of hard work."

"You are going to the East—as you have dreamed of doing?"

"No! On the contrary, I am going to the West. As you know, I am a civil and mining engineer, and for men in my line, Alaska and the Yukon Territory offer plenty of scope just now, whilst the life is hard and strenuous and far removed from—from drug-shops. So I am sailing for Canada to-morrow."

As he named his destination, a little flush appeared in the girl's face. She divined instinctively the reason which took him West when his dreams had always been of the East. Canada was her home, and she knew as certainly as if he had told her that in that fact lay the reason for his choice; but beyond the little flush she gave no sign of understanding. Her gaze moved from his face to the sealed, ribbon-bound box which he still held in his hand, and a troubled light came in her eyes.

"You are taking that with you?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered simply.

"But—but are you not courting risks?"

"Perhaps," he answered with a grim laugh.

"Indeed, I think that it is certain that I am."

"Then why—why——"

"Because I have no fancy to escape an enemy merely by running away. If I won out of the toils that way, I think I should never be sure of myself. One must live with one's enemy, have it in sight and touch, if one is to conquer. If it were altogether beyond reach, it would not be a real fight—so the box goes with me. I shall never part with it. Always I shall be meeting my enemy in the gate. You understand, Betty?"

"Yes," she said, and there was a little sparkle in her eyes. "Yes! But you are taking a hard way."

"A man's way, I hope. And anyway you have sealed my enemy in prison." He laughed a little as he spoke, then looked at the clock. "I must go, Betty. I have much to do before to-morrow."

"What time to you go?" she asked quickly.

"By the boat train to Southampton at ten forty-five."

She hesitated, as if considering, and then held out her hand. "If I don't see you again before you go—good-bye, Neil. If you try, I am sure you will win."

"If I don't——" He broke off abruptly and turning towards the door, left the room.

Betty followed him to the steps, and as he turned with the pain of parting in his eyes, and his face set in grim lines, she waved her hand to him; and watched him as he went blindly down the street. Then she fled to her own room, and throwing herself in a chair, sat with her hands clenching each other, her face the index of troubled thought.

"Oh," she whispered at last in self-reproach, "why did I not tell him? Why did I not give him a little hope?"

Some idea of retrieving her mistake took her down to Waterloo the following morning. She arrived there five minutes before the train was due to leave; and the first person she saw was Maurice Endicott. He was standing by a truck-load of luggage which seemed to have a special interest for him, for just as the girl saw him he stooped, and taking one of the luggage tags in his hand deliberately read it. As he looked up he met Betty Marlowe's eyes, and immediately moved towards her. As he reached her, he waved his hand towards the truck which a porter was in the act of moving.

"So," he said, "our friend Neil is going on a little trip to Canada. I wonder where he is? We

might wish him *bon voyage* together. It is a happy coincidence that we should be here to see him off. . . . Ah, there he is—at the bookstall! Do you join forces with me, Miss Marlowe?"

Musgrave was turning from the stall, and the train was almost due to start. Betty would have preferred to go alone to wish him good-bye, but the circumstances did not allow it; and seeing no other course open to her, short of actual rudeness, she fell into step and walked down the platform with Endicott.

Neil Musgrave had reached the compartment where his seat was reserved, and was standing on the step surveying the crowded platform with roving eyes. Betty divined that he was looking for her, and was unutterably glad that she had decided to see him off. She saw the gladness leap into his eyes as they fell on her, and the next moment saw it extinguished as they travelled to her companion. As they reached him, Endicott was the first to speak.

"Deserting your friends—hey—Musgrave, and without giving them a chance to weep at your departure! But here are two of us who refuse to be baulked, so you have to submit to the final tears after all."

"It is very good of you to come," answered Musgrave stiffly, his eyes looking beyond them, his face mask-like.

"Not at all," laughed Endicott easily. "It is one of the pleasurable duties of friendship."

"Indeed!" answered Musgrave, in a tone that was almost arctic.

"Yes! indeed," retorted Endicott. "Is not that so, Miss Marlowe?"

Betty, who had not yet spoken, saw the guard standing with the flag in his hand, and guessed that she had but a moment. She knew that it was

in Neil Musgrave's mind that she and Endicott had come to the station together, and she was wondering how to disabuse him of the idea, and without putting it into actual words convey to Neil the fact that she had come alone.

"Mr. Endicott is taking more virtue to himself than he can rightfully claim, Neil," she said, laughingly ignoring Endicott's question. "It is by accident that he is here. He saw your luggage and read the label. I saw him."

That Neil Musgrave understood was at once evident. The mask-like look left his face and the gladness came into his eyes anew. He was about to speak when a fussy porter intervened.

"Take your seats!" he cried raucously. "Take your seats!"

His hand was on the door and Musgrave was forced to retreat inside. The door banged, and as Musgrave's head and shoulders appeared at the window the whistle blew. Instantly Betty stepped forward with hand outstretched. The young man took it, and she cried hurriedly, "Good luck, Neil. Write to me!"

"Stand clear! Stand clear, there!"

The train was moving, and without speaking Neil Musgrave released her hand, but as the train receded looked at her with grateful eyes. The girl waved her hand; received an answering wave, and then the train gathered pace and they were lost to each other in the crowd and the fluttering handkerchiefs and waving hands from the open windows. Betty stood watching the rear of the train until Endicott's voice broke on her ears.

"You knew Neil was going away, Miss Marlowe?" he inquired suavely.

"Yes," she answered frankly, "he came to see me yesterday, and he told me."

"Rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it is like Neil."

"He told you his plans?"

"Some of them," answered Betty, a little frostily.

"And the secret of the silver box? He told you that, Miss Marlowe?"

"Yes," was the reply, "he told me that, also."

"Ah!"

A light of understanding came into Maurice Endicott's eyes. By some swift intuition he grasped the meaning of Musgrave's unexpected departure, and his next remark was the outcome of this intuitive knowledge.

"I am afraid his chances are rather small."

"His chances?" The girl looked at him in some bewilderment.

"Yes, his chances of deliverance from—er—the silver box, you know; for that I imagine is the meaning—or shall I say the hope—of this sudden exile, is it not? He is fleeing from his enemy."

"No," answered Betty, remembering the be-ribboned box. "No, he is not fleeing from it."

Endicott was not convinced. He shook his head sagely.

"A man's habits are himself, and once a man has surrendered to drugs——"

"Mr. Endicott," interrupted Betty sharply, "one would think that you do not want Neil to deliver himself."

At this unexpected charge Endicott was visibly disturbed. A look of quick anxiety came on his face, and the next moment he was protesting volubly: "Miss Marlowe, how can you think that? Believe me, no one would be more pleased than I to know that Neil had dropped the habit. It is not pleasant to see one's friends going to the dogs. But I know how strong is the drug habit; how few are the chances of a man winning clear."

"Well, we must hope for Neil," said Betty, a little mollified. "At least, he is taking a heroic way."

"Yes?" answered Endicott. "What is he going to do? Bury himself in the backwoods, or immerse himself in the excitements of railway construction?"

There was something beyond ordinary curiosity in his tones as he asked the questions, and the girl realised it. She glanced at him quickly, and caught his eyes fixed upon her expectantly.

"You are very curious to know his plans?" she asked, struck by the look in his eyes.

"Naturally," answered Endicott with a little laugh. "One is always curious about the mysterious movements of one's friends."

"Then I am afraid I cannot help you," answered Betty quietly. "Neil did not tell me all that he proposed to do; and if he had, I—ah—I should have respected his confidence. . . . But here is my taxi, ticking off tuppences as fast as it can, and I can't afford to waste money. Good morning, Mr. Endicott."

She gave the driver directions and stepping into the vehicle was driven away. With a frown gathering about his eyes, Maurice Endicott watched her go. He stood for perhaps a couple of minutes immersed in thought, then he himself took a taxi and was driven to Major Andover's chambers.

He found the Major sitting over a late breakfast with a sporting paper propped against the teapot. Andover looked at him in some surprise.

"You're an early bird, Maurice!"

"Yes. I've just come from Waterloo. Been seeing Musgrave off to Canada."

"To Canada!" There was something like consternation on the Major's face as he echoed the words. "What the deuce has he gone there for?"

"I can only guess," answered the young man

quietly. "I saw him at the station by a mere accident, and read his luggage labels."

"And what do you guess?" asked the Major harshly.

"That he's making an attempt to pull up! There was a girl at the station to see him off."

The Major considered this information for quite a long time; then he asked abruptly, "Who was the girl?"

"You saw her the other night," answered Endicott shortly.

"Not Miss Marlowe?"

Endicott nodded gloomily in answer to the question, and the Major spoke again: "Then, my boy, your nose is out of joint."

"It's not the only one that is suffering that way," retorted the younger man viciously.

"True!" The Major fingered his own aquiline member tenderly and contemplatively, then he said quietly, "This is confoundedly serious news, Maurice, my boy. We shall have to do something. I think a consultation with our friend Appleyard might be advisable—hey?"

"Possibly."

"But there's one thing that is consoling," said the Major tentatively. "Canada is a big place—and in some parts a wild one. Anything might happen to our young friend out there."

"I wish he'd break his neck!" exclaimed Endicott explosively.

"They never do," said the Major cynically. "The unwanted bear a charmed life." He pushed his plate from him and lit a cigarette, and through the first cloud of smoke considered his visitor carefully. There was a savage, malevolent look on the young man's face, and Major Andover found it encouraging. "A charmed life," he repeated. "The ordinary

moving accidents of flood and field seem to pass the unwanted by upon the other side. But perhaps it might be possible to—er—arrange things.”

“What do you mean, Major?” asked his visitor, with a quick, intent look.

The Major answered the question with another. “What were your chances with Miss Marlowe before this other Richmond came into the field?”

“I thought they were good.”

“And if he were out of the way the chances would be what they were before, hey?”

“Very likely.”

“And Miss Marlowe’s money would come your way. . . . I think you said she had money.”

“Pots of it coming to her.”

“You said ‘a little’ the other day,” said the Major, smilingly reproachfully “but pots are as much better than a little as a feast is better than a dinner with herbs. . . . I suppose you are pretty well dipped?”

“Don’t know which way to turn, and Appleyard won’t part with another cent. I’m broke.”

“That is sorry hearing,” said the Major sympathetically. “Appleyard is inconsiderate to the needs of youth—sometimes. I suppose, if he were to begin to press you, you would be in a hole.”

“A hole! No! A deep coal mine! And he has already begun. I had a rather nasty little note from him yesterday.”

“That is unfortunate,” said the Major, again sympathetically. He puffed at his cigarette thoughtfully a few times, then he asked. “I imagine if you were clear of Appleyard you’d be fairly comfortable, hey?”

“I should be in clover. He swallows every cent of my income.”

“Suppose that could be arranged,” said the Major,

watching his visitor through narrowed eyes, "would you take a trip to Canada with me?"

At the question a startled look came on Endicott's face, and he looked at the Major intently.

"To Canada—why?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, on—er—a shooting trip, you know. Big game and—er—all that. It's years, positively years, since I had a hunting trip."

The startled look died out of Maurice Endicott's face, and was replaced by one of crafty comprehension. He did not meet the Major's eyes, but turned and looked out of the window, and Andover went on persuasively: "I think we could touch Appleyard for the expenses of the trip, you know; indeed, I am open to bet a hundred pounds on it."

"But Appleyard would know?" objected the younger man.

"Pooh—what of that? He is as interested as we are in—er—big game." The Major laughed sardonically. "You wouldn't think of it to look at him; but it's true."

"I wonder what your interest is, Major?" said Endicott unexpectedly. "You've never told me—"

"Nor ever shall, my boy," interrupted the Major genially. "It's not the same as yours, at any rate, and that should suffice for you! Well, what do you say? Shall we go down and see Appleyard about the exes?"

"You think he'll——"

"My dear fellow, I know," answered the Major with a sudden sharp laugh, "and we may as well fix the business at once."

Half an hour after, as they descended to the street on their way to the financier's office, the Major hummed a gay little song to himself, and wore the air of a man with whom the world was going very well.

CHAPTER IV

AT CEDAR FORKS

THE first high tide of the '97 gold rush carried civilisation (of sorts) into the arctic wastes as fast as pack-horse and scow and canoe could travel the frightful passes and the desperate waterways, and with each subsidiary rush new "cities" sprang into being, growing like Jonah's gourd in the night. And most of these, hungering for the amenities of the civilisation of the Southland, reared, or had reared for them by enterprising ruffians, saloons which did a thriving trade and which to their owners were more valuable than many a paying Klondyke claim.

Before one of these, now seven years old, in the crimson light of a late Northland evening, Neil Musgrave stood considering. The street, which was no more than a clearing cut along the river front, with stumps of trees, which in some cases were casting forth young shoots, still in the ground, was deserted, but from the saloon came the tinkle of a piano with a roar of voices singing one of those old plantation choruses which America has inflicted on the world.

*"Sing-song, Kitty, can't you ki' me oh!
Ke-mo, Ki-mo, Dar! oh whar?
Wid my hi, my ho, and in come Sally singing,
Sometimes penny-winkle, bing tum—nip-cat
Sing-song Kitty, can't you ki' me oh!"*

An odd smile came on his face as he listened, and then he looked up at the primitive sign-board over the saloon entrance which proclaimed that the far from imposing structure was the Mikado Opera

House. He smiled again, whimsically, at the grandiose title, and then looked back at the ochre-coloured flood of the river. He had crossed the dreaded Chilcoot, bruised his feet among the water-worn stones of the Dyea Flats, beaten up Lake Lindermann in an icy gale, braved the wild water of the Box Canyon, and had ridden the dreaded Mane of the White Horse, paddling for sheer life to keep the boat on the high ridge of water that had dealt out death to so many men; and on the top of all that had done six hundred miles in an open boat, to have this particular form of civilisation greet him two thousand miles from its birthplace. The smile of a sudden became a laugh and as the chorus rolled out anew he began to hum it to himself—*"Sing-song, Kitty, can't you ki' me oh!"* and to the time of its absurdities entered the saloon.

The scene that met his eyes, as he entered, was one that his imaginative mind had already visioned. At the far end of the saloon was a long bar where a rough-featured man and a girl with yellow hair and a be-rouged face dispensed fiery whisky and manufactured champagne, with softer drinks for cautious men. Card tables were scattered along one side of the room, and on the other were a couple of roulette tables where a crowd of men staked their hard-won gold dust. At the bar itself were standing some half-dozen men, one of whom, as Musgrave instantly recognised, was already a victim of his potations. As he walked forward these men, on a word from the bar-tender, turned and looked at him curiously.

"Stranger!" commented one of them in a growling voice that Musgrave could not help but hear. "*A chechaquo!*"

The young man recognised the Northland name for a tenderfoot, and permitted himself to smile

as he walked forward, meeting the inquisitive gaze of the bar-loafers with the blank British stare that so many men find hard to endure. When he reached the bar, he read a list of drinks painted up on a two-foot board, and ordered a pineapple squash. Scarcely had the order passed his lips, when the man who had named him *chechaquo* intervened in a roaring tone.

"Pineapple! No! I'll be shot if you do! Mak' it a pain-killer, Bill!"

The man behind the bar hesitated and looked questioningly at Neil, as if waiting for a countermanding of his order.

"Pineapple!" said the young man in an even voice, and half-turned to look at the man who had intervened.

The fellow had bully written all over him, and his rough, frost-scarred countenance crumpled in a ferocious grin as he met Musgrave's eye.

"Ye'd better let Ginger Bob hev his way," whispered the bar-tender urgently. "He's bin fightin' the pain-killer all night an' he's a check or two outside the limit. Dangerous—you know, stranger, unless yer can fight."

"Pain-killer," shouted the bully, staring savagely at the man who dared to cross his will. There was a drunken challenge in his stare, and Neil Musgrave recognised it for what it was. Nevertheless, though conscious of a little clutch at his heart, he looked at the bar-tender.

"How long are you going to be with that pineapple?" he said composedly.

The bar-tender made a gesture of despair, and proceeded to mix the entirely innocuous drink which the young man had ordered. The operation finished, he set the drink down upon the bar-counter, took the payment for it, then cautiously slipped

back the six feet or so that the width of the bar permitted, and watched for developments. Others also watched. The tinkle of "Ke-mo! Ki-mo!" ended suddenly. A great hush fell upon the saloon; even the roulette ball stopped whirling, and Neil Musgrave was very conscious that all present were watching to see how he would acquit himself when the moment came. The young man took up the mug in which the drink was served and was raising it to his lips when with an oath the bully took a step forward and struck at the mug with clenched fist. But his intended victim had expected some such move, and swiftly changed the position of the mug so that when he struck Ginger Bob received the contents full in the face.

For a moment the bully blinked and cursed, then with a roar rushed at Musgrave. But as he did so there came an intervention. The intoxicated man, whom Musgrave had noticed on his entrance, lurched forward a step, and thrust a leg in the bully's way. Immediately Ginger Bob measured his length upon the floor, and when he picked himself up, he was gnashing his teeth and growling like an enraged grizzly. Without a word he stepped forward and with a tremendous blow knocked the man who had been the cause of his discomfiture clean off his feet. The drunken man fell heavily to the ground; and, roaring now, the bully leaped forward and lifted his foot to stamp upon the fallen man's face. But he reckoned without Neil Musgrave, who, apart from the fact that the man on the floor was suffering on his behalf, could not stand by to witness so brutal a thing. He acted quickly. A single spring brought him up to the bully, and, with the latter perched upon one leg, it was a simple matter to thrust him over. He did it none too gently, and then, white of face, but with clenched

jaw and steady eye, waited until the bully picked himself up.

Never in his life before had he stood up to meet the rush of an infuriated man, nor had he fought with naked fists. But in his university days he had been in the running for the boxing championship, and the weeks of hard toil since leaving England had steadied his drug-racked nerves and toned him up wonderfully. He did not know and could not even conjecture what knowledge of boxing science the bully might have, but it was easy to anticipate that an opponent already enraged would make a rushing fight. He prepared himself accordingly, and when Ginger Bob rushed in, he leaped lightly aside, and as the bully passed gave him a straight left-hander in the ribs. The charging man whirled half-way round at the impact, turned with a swiftness that was remarkable in so heavy a man, and rushed again. This time the younger man did not step aside, but slipped under and passed, and then retreated down the room, whilst the spectators roared approval. Then the fight went forward quickly, the bully constantly making short rushes, his opponent consistently trying to avoid them and planting his blows when and where he could. Neil knew that once the bully gripped him he would be helpless, for the man was stouter heavier than himself, and, as he had already shown, was troubled with no scruples in his method of fighting. Accordingly he strove with all his powers to avoid that contingency, but the disaster almost overtook him.

Ginger Bob made one of his wild rushes, missed, and went down before a crashing blow on the side of the head. Neil, whose blood was now thoroughly up, stepped in, waiting for him to rise, determined to make an end of the matter. But instead of

rising, the bully suddenly shot out his long arms and, gripping his opponent's ankles, jerked him from his feet. The young man went down with a crash ; and growling like a wild beast now sure of his prey, the bully thrust himself forward. Neil, very conscious of his danger, acted swiftly. Twice he rolled over and then leaped to his feet just as the other, baulked of his victim, gathered himself up. It was, as he recognised, no time for scruples, and without a second's hesitation he stepped in, and drove his clenched right fist in the other's face. As the bully staggered beneath the impact, a clean left-handed drive caught him on the point of the chin, and again he crashed to the floor and lay still.

Neil waited, breathing heavily, but watching the prone man with wary eyes. Ginger Bob did not move, and the victor was conscious of a roar of voices. Then a friendly if unsteady hand clapped him on the shoulder.

"Shure, sorr, ye can lave the swine, now. He's a downer an' an outer ; an' I owe ye a big dhrink. Come an' put a name to ut !"

Neil Musgrave turned swiftly and in the speaker recognised the intoxicated man whose intervening leg had brought about the bully's first discomfiture. Evidently the attack which he himself had suffered had sobered and steadied him somewhat, and there was something in his frank friendliness which appealed to the Englishman, stranger in a strange land as he was. Impulsively he turned towards the bar with the Irishman.

"Name ut ! Name ut !" cried his new-found friend joyously.

"Pineapple squash !"

"Pineapple——" The Irishman broke off, allowing his astonishment to overcome him. Then he began again : "That be shot for a drink ! Man, ye'r

celebrathin' a victory, an' so shure as me name is Pat McGuire——"

"Pineapple or nothing!" said Neil with a laugh.

With an expression of comical dismay on his face, McGuire looked at the bar-tender.

"Fetch out thim Sunday-school slops, Bill. Two pineapples, an' if thar's inybody ilse with a fancy for the biverage the shout's mine."

The humour of the thing appealed to most of those present, and as amid laughter they consumed this, to them, entirely novel refreshment, the Irishman spoke again.

"Fwhat name did they give ye, chum, whin ye was christened?"

"Neil Musgrave."

"An' a toppin' name too!" Then followed the next question. "An' where are ye stayin' in this city if I may be so bowld as to ax?"

"Don't know yet! I have only just arrived. I was hoping that possibly the proprietor of this saloon offered accommodation."

"He does!" interrupted McGuire. "An' he's a thafe an' a robber. That's so, isn't ut, Bill?" He looked at the bar-tender and laughed, then he addressed himself to Musgrave again. "'Tis not to such a shearer I'd deliver such a tindher lamb as ye, me bhoy. Ye'll come along o' me, to 'onest, for though me cabin is but a lodge in the wilderness, 'tis no den of robbers. Come along. I'll be happy to accommodate ye—an' 'tis as well that we both lave here soon, for Ginger will be clane mad whin he wakes out of the slape ye've put on him; an' if he was to take to gunnin'—'twould be sarious. Come along, bhoy!"

Without hesitation Neil Musgrave accepted the invitation and presently found himself and his

belongings reposing in a log shack that was cleaner and more comfortable than he had expected.

"Sit ye down, bhoy, while I make the coffee, an' fry the bacon an' beef."

"Beef?" queried Neil.

"Canned!" explained McGuire. "Came up from Dawson no later than yesterday. Ye've let lucky."

As he watched the Irishman prepare the impromptu meal, Neil Musgrave felt that what the other said was true; and when he had eaten and was sitting over a pipe listening to his host's prospecting experiences in the North, the feeling grew to a conviction.

"Look here, McGuire," he said suddenly, "what are you doing now?"

"Spendin' ut!" laughed the Irishman. "An' by the same token the bank's nearly broke."

"Then you'll soon be pulling out on a new expedition?"

"Thru!" said the Irishman. "Needs must whin the divil drives."

Neil was silent for a moment; then he said tentatively, "What do you say to joining forces with me?"

"Jine forces? Is ut a pardnership ye's manin', bhoy?"

"Just that! I'm what Ginger Bob called me—a *chechaquo*: but I have the science. I am by profession an engineer, and whilst I don't know the North——"

McGuire thrust out a gnarled hand. "Put ut thare, bhoy, I guess ye're honust an' I like the style av ye!"

Niel Musgrave gave the Irishman his hand, McGuire wrung it heartily. "Deeds signed, sealed an' delivered," he said, "I'm a pocket-miner, meself, an' don't know much about science, but

I've always found enough av the yellow to pull through the winther, joyfully; but with ye to hilp I guess I'll become a bloated millionaire."

"I m not so sure about that," laughed Musgrave. "I didn't come up here to make a fortune, though of course if that is to be done——"

"Thin fwat in thunder did ye come for?" asked McGuire curiously. "Ye're the first man I've struck who, one way or another, was not afther the gold."

Musgrave's face grew suddenly serious, and a look of pain came in his eyes, which the Irishman was quick to notice. It was a moment before the reply came, and then it was given with hesitation.

"I don't think I'll tell you that, Pat . . . if you don't mind. Every man has his troubles and sometimes he runs away from them."

"'Tis the other way wid me," said McGuire lightly. "I ginerally make a bee-line to mine. an' that is the rye-whisky they disthribute at the Mikado. But wid ye for company I'll be glad to lave ut in the rear for once."

Musgrave nodded his understanding, and then they began to discuss the proposed expedition. "The sooner we lave this city the betther," said McGuire. "Ginger Bob'll have it chalked up agin ye, my son, an' he's a dirthy fighter."

"I'm sure of that," answered Musgrave. "What is he—a miner?"

"Calls hissilf such, but 'tis little rale mining that he does. He's not on the square. I've known him salt a claim an' sell it to a lad who brought dollars in from the outside; he's been a whisky-runner an' a cattle-rustler in his time, an' there ain't a dirthy job going that he won't pick up if thar's dust at the ind ov ut."

"An amiable character!" commented Neil.

"Amiable is ut? Ye watch out, pardner, if ye should happen to mate him in the forest. He's a dandy man wid a gun, an' if he can use ut on the quiet——" The Irishman broke off and made a significant gesture.

"Oh, he's that sort, is he?"

"All the way! He'll go for ye on sight, whin 'tis safe."

"Then I shall have to look out for him," said Neil lightly. "But we won't waste any more time at present over Ginger Bob. Apart from him I shall be glad to leave Cedar Forks, and the sooner we pull out the better."

"How did you get here?" asked McGuire.

"Did the last three hundred miles in a canoe!" answered Musgrave promptly. "But it won't be big enough for our expedition."

"No, we'll want a Peterboro', an' glory be, I know whare that same is to be found at this prisint moment. Wait, pardner—I'll be back in a jiffy."

The jiffy represented a good three-quarters of an hour, and as the moments passed, Neil Musgrave gave himself up to reverie. Presently he thrust his hand into an inner pocket and taking something therefrom sat with it in his open palm, staring at it with fixed eyes. It was the be-ribboned dragon-lidded box which Betty Marlowe had so carefully sealed. Into his face crept a look of hunger. In the last few days he had often stared at it so, with the drug-hunger urging him to break the seal, and now he was conscious of that urge afresh. His eyes grew strangely bright. A great longing betrayed itself in his face. He looked at the sealed box with the fixed, fascinated look that the rabbit yields to the snake in the moments before it dies. His pulse quickened, and his breath was taken in short, quick gasps. The mad craving mounted

within him like a tidal wave. He shook with the stress of his desire, and a few beads of sweat showed on his bronzed forehead.

A step sounded outside, but he took no notice of it. Then the door, which had been ajar, opened, and three seconds later he became aware of McGuire standing there, regarding him curiously. Instantly his hand closed on the box to hide it, and he recovered himself with a discordant laugh ; at the same time returning the box to his pocket. The surprise in his partner's face was not to be hidden, and the moment was an awkward one. But Pat McGuire was one of nature's gentlemen. He divined that here was trouble of which he knew nothing, and his innate gentility kept him from making any inquiry that would have been vulgarly curious. To cover the awkwardness, he laughed his genial laugh.

"The boat's ours," he announced. "we'll be able to pull out afther El Dorado to-morrow. 'Tis we that have the luck to-night, pardner."

But an hour later when Neil Musgrave's breathing told the Irishman that his new-found partner was asleep, he roused himself upon his elbow, and stared towards the bunk where the young man lay.

"In God's name, fwhat's got the bhoy ? " he whispered to himself—then as he recalled the look that he had seen on his companion's face, he whispered again : "'Twas hivven or hell the bhoy was seein'—an' God knows which ! "

Which saying revealed that in Pat McGuire's estimation these places of ultimate destination are not so far apart as is popularly supposed.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUR OF DOUBT

IT was two months later, and in the camp on the unnamed tributary of the Porcupine River, Neil Musgrave sat smoking, watching the brown waters as they slid by. He was alone, and there was a look of strength and health upon his face which proclaimed that he had chosen wisely in making this northern wilderness his sanctuary. Ten miles away the Arctic Circle marked the zone of sterility and death; but he was stretched on freely growing grass, and behind him was a dense forest of spruce that with its dark foliage mocked the frost and snows of the North. Somewhere quite near at hand a robin was cheeping, and through the stillness, sounding above the swirl of the river came the honk! honk! of wild geese. He looked up, and far up in the glow of the evening sky saw a wedge-shape formation of these birds whose summer home is in the wilds of the Circle. They were travelling southward, and as he marked the course of their flight, Musgrave nodded to himself.

"They smell the winter," he said loud. "the exodus is beginning. I wonder when Pat will be back."

He felt in his pocket and took out a folded calendar. Opening it, he considered the date. It was now September, and producing a pencil he carefully ticked off the date, as all the other days had been ticked since they had left the City of Cedar Forks. Then, with the butt of the pencil at his lips, he began to calculate. Presently he made a note or two on the back of the calendar, and then nodded

"To-morrow at the latest. Just as well. Unless we're going to winter in this wilderness we shall have to be following the geese. I wonder if he'll get the stores?"

As if in answer to his thoughts far down the river appeared a canoe, with two men paddling. He started to his feet, and watched it carefully for a moment, then a smile of satisfaction came on his face.

"Pat and the Indian! On time!"

Aided by the current, and driven by the strong arms of the paddlers, the canoe came on at a rapid pace, and presently the man in the bow caught sight of him, and drifting through the silence came the distant hail.

"Ahoy! Me bhoy!"

Making a trumpet of his hands, Neil shouted back, and into his eyes came a light of pleasure, for in the past two months there had grown up in him a deep regard for the genial Irishman, whom no danger could daunt and no difficulty depress. McGuire had been away nine days, and he had missed him more than he had dreamed that he could miss any man; and now, impatient for the imminent meeting, he began to tramp up and down the bank in front of the encampment. A few minutes later, dipping long, strong strokes, McGuire and the Indian suddenly whirled the canoe against the current, and paddled gently in shore.

"Got it, me bhoy!" cried the Irishman triumphantly, as he stepped ashore. He waved his hand towards the canoe as he spoke. "A sack av beans, one av flour, two sides av pork, an' some tins av molasses. I had to blarney the man to git ut, as only short supplies have come through. But we won't starve now."

"No, we shall pull through all right now. I'm glad to see you back, Pat."

"Faith, an' 'tis not sorry I am to be back mesilf. But fwhat am I thinkin' av? I've somethin' for ye, me bhoy."

Turning back to the canoe, he tossed aside a couple of blankets and produced a small bundle of newspapers, tied together with a thong of moosehide.

"Catch!" he said, tossing the bundle to his partner. "I knew ye'd like thim, so I stole him from the factor at the store."

"But——"

"Oh, he's all right. Nivver ye worry about him. He'd had thim papers a month an' ye may be dead sure that he's read every blissed word av them from the births, deaths an' marriages to the stock sales an' the cures for biliousness. 'Twill save the man from wastin' any more time over thim."

Neil Musgrave laughed and accepted the stolen gift lightly enough, and when supper was over, having listened to the rather prosy details of his partner's unadventurous journey, he opened the papers and began to glance through them.

The latest of them was three months old, but to a man who had not seen a paper for twice that number of months the news was as fresh as yesterday. As he read by the light of a slush lamp conveniently placed at his elbow he grew absorbed whilst his partner, tired by the day's exertion, nodded over his pipe, and then fell sound asleep.

He was wakened by a cry from Musgrave, and as his eyes opened he turned quickly to look at him. The young man was staring at one of the papers that he had taken from the bundle—one of the illustrated Sunday papers; and on his face was a look of mingled surprise and trouble which told the Irishman that all the news that he had brought was not good. He rose from his seat, and took a step forward. "Fwhat is ut, bhoy?"

As his partner made no reply he leaned over his shoulder and looked at the paper which the other was holding and staring at with troubled eyes. It was the middle page of the paper, full of pictures, and as he looked at them the Irishman could see nothing in them that would account for the look on his companion's face. There were several portraits on the page, pictures of a social function in Ontario, and of the wreck of a mail train in which several lives had been lost and a considerable number of people injured. The portraits were those of people who had been through the smash ; and it was on these that Musgrave's eyes were fixed, for both the faces were well known to him, the one being Miss Betty Marlowe's and the other Maurice Endicott's. Underneath them was a line or two of print, and having read it through once, the young man gave a little laugh of bitterness, and then read it aloud.

" ' Miss Betty Marlowe and Mr. Maurice Endicott (London), who went through the disaster ; and who, it is rumoured, will shortly face the disasters of life together.' What do you think of that, Pat ? "

" So that's fwhat's throublin' ye, me son, is ut ? " The Irishman leaned closer to his companion's shoulder and looked carefully at the girl's portrait. Then he asked, " Fwhat was the girl to ye, anyway, Neil ? "

" She was—well—the only one, Pat ! "

" Promised to ye ? "

" No, not promised, but——"

" No need to say more, me bhoy. I understand ; but there's one thing I'll wager on, an' 'tis that that's a face to trust."

" You think so ? "

" I'd gamble on it to the limit—an' beyond ; an' that bein' so, I should say that one of thim newspaper guys has been doing a little guessing

on his own account. 'Ut is rumoured,' says he, but fwat's a rumour? Jist a bloomin' lie! Ivery-body knows that."

"But what is Maurice Endicott doing in Canada; and what were they doing together?"

"Don't know the gent," answered McGuire quickly, "so 'tis no use axin' me conundhrums. But he's one to improve the shining hours; an' I wouldn't trust him with two cents worth av' tin-tacks. A face like that—oh! 'tis good-looking enough, I'll grant ye—should put a man on his guard, an' frighten a woman into the next street. The man's a wolf."

"Back in the old country he was a friend of mine, Pat!"

"But ye got no good from him, bhoy, did ye? Now jist think an' tell me."

Neil Musgrave thought, carefully recalling past events with the Irishman's words for searchlight, and when at length he spoke there was a frown on his face.

"You're right, Pat, all the way; but I never realised the truth before."

"'Tis the way with the young," said the Irishman quite simply. "They're too innocent to spot villains. The man was friend to ye; an' I'll warrant he used his friendship to his own ends. Ye got no help from him?"

Neil Musgrave's hand went suddenly to the sealed box in his pocket, and the frown darkened.

"I got trouble from him," he said slowly, "the trouble that drove me up here to the wilds."

"So!" said McGuire dryly. "An' ye're getting throuble from him again. An' ye will, bhoy, so long as it suits him. That man is not fitted out wid scruples, ye can see it in the face av him. He's a killer if it suits the purpose av him, take my word

for that, me son. But the girl is a different proposition. If I'd her word——"

"I haven't her word, Pat."

"No; but ye've as good, haven't ye? Words is not needed whin two young folks catch a mind to each other. 'Tis like wireless tiligraphy—a flash out into the night, and there 'tis. Afther that—words is jist no more than the froth that floats at the tail av an eddy. The girl's all right—don't ye worry about that!"

But Neil Musgrave did worry. Long after McGuire's snores filled the tent he sat there near the tent door, deep in thought. He could not regard the association of Betty Marlowe and Maurice Endicott as a merely accidental one, and again and again he asked himself what the latter was doing in Canada at all? To that question he could find only one answer. Endicott, as he knew, was no sportsman, and he was so thoroughly a man about town that the mere thought of the Colonies either for a trip or as a place of residence must have been utterly abhorrent to him. Yet here he was in Canada, evidently in close association with Betty, and in such friendly companionship that a journalist found in it a significance so obvious that he had printed the two portraits together, and invented—or perhaps reported—a rumour to satisfy the newspaper reader's craving for romance. But he would scarcely have done that without some ground for doing so. The circumstances all pointed to one thing, and as Neil Musgrave considered them a deadly depression fell upon him.

He recalled the Irishman's words about Betty—but did not find them helpful. What could McGuire know about a girl he had never seen, and whom he had never heard of before that night? The portrait? Portraits were notoriously deceptive. Any photo-

grapher could touch them up till the whole character of the face was altered ; and whilst the portrait of Betty in the paper was quite obviously a good one, McGuire's judgment was not necessarily correct. So, as he thought, the doubts mounted and the depression of spirit grew more pronounced. At the end of an hour he felt in an inner pocket and drew forth the dragon-lidded box, with its wrapping of silk ribbon, and its violet seal. Bending towards the fire, he read for the hundredth time the motto of the seal :

" Resurgam ! "

He had stayed himself with the thought that Betty's selection of that particular seal had been deliberate and significant. Often the hope it expressed had been his help in difficult moments when the persistent craving of the drug-victim had asserted itself. Now, as he looked at it, he laughed cynically. What was the use anyway if Betty, for whom the effort was being made, was giving herself to Maurice Endicott ? Why deny himself the exhilaration hidden in the sealed box, if the desired fruits of such denial were not to be his ?

The question swept through his mind swiftly, and with it came a reckless impulse to break the seal, cut the ribbon, and in a few minutes banish the depression which had fallen upon him. The hunger for the cocaine mounted within him, and began to plead speciously for indulgence. Why should he be the victim of depression when relief was there to his hand ? It was not his fault if he failed ; for if Betty was false, why should he be faithful ? When one party to a contract failed to observe the terms, the other was by that fact absolved ; and if that rumour thus publicly proclaimed had any ground whatever, he was free to act as desire dictated and to do what he would with his own life.

A set look came on his face, and his eyes kindled with eager light. Not now did he struggle as he had often struggled in past months ; instead he let the tide of desire sweep through him, and in anticipation tasted the exhilaration that would follow indulgence. Suddenly he thrust a hand to his belt, slipped from its sheath the long hunting-knife he carried, and after a quick reckless laugh tapped the brittle wax of the seal with the blade. The sealing wax cracked across, and he lifted the point of the knife to chip it away.

At that moment Pat McGuire, wakened by the sound of his companion's laugh, sat up and looked towards the tent door. The gleam of the knife in Musgrave's hand startled him, and at the first glance a sudden fear of what the other was about leaped up within him. The "bhoy" was in trouble about the girl, what if——? The thought died before it was completed, and as he watched McGuire was reassured. Apparently his companion was not contemplating self-slaughter, for he was digging the point of the knife at something in his left hand. Pat craned his neck to discover what it was, and as he caught the gleam of silver, guessed that it was the silver box which he had seen once before—on the first night of their acquaintance. He sank back upon his couch of spruce boughs wondering what the box contained ; but he did not close his eyes for, as he reclined himself, a quick hoarse cry came from the young man :

"No, by heavens, I won't !"

He dropped the box to the ground, and then slipped to his knees staring at it as it gleamed in the fire-light. His face was ravaged, and in his eyes was the glare of sharp desire. The Irishman watched in amazement, and then caught a fierce whisper.

"Why not? Why not? Who cares whether I——?"

The whisper broke off, and stooping swiftly, Musgrave caught up the box, and tore at the ribbon which bound it, then stopped again, gave a sharp cry, and with a quick sweep of his arm, flung the box from him. At that the Irishman slipped from his blanket.

"Fwhat's got ye, bhoy?"

Neil Musgrave turned to him a startled face, and the Irishman continued: "I saw ye, bhoy. Ye wakened me, an' I could not hilp it. But fwhat is ut, me son; maybe I can help ye?"

"No, you can't, Pat," said the young man quickly. "Nobody can! It is one of those cases where a man has to fight alone."

"Tell me, bhoy," persisted the Irishman. "I've seen ye like this once before, an' I'm worried for ye. Fwhat is it? Fwhat have ye got to fight? Is it in that box ye've thrown away?"

"Yes," answered the other simply, rising to his feet, "and I must find it again."

"Find it again! Fwhat are ye talkin' about? If ye've thrown ut away the throuble's inded."

"No! That would mean that I was defeated."

"Ye're feared av fwhat is in the box?"

"Yes! I'm deadly afraid of it."

"An' yit ye're afther goin' to look for ut again?"

"I must," said Neil quietly. "It is important. You don't understand, Pat."

"Maybe I understand a dale more than ye think, bhoy. I saw the look on the face av ye jist now; an jist so have I seen a man look on the whisky whin he's bin months on the trail, an' not able to git a drop for love or money. Truth to tell, I've had lanin's that way mesilf, so ye needn't be afraid to tell me. I've hungered——"

"Cocaine, Pat—you?"

"Is that fwhat ye call the divil in that box? No! I've had no thruck with fancy vices. Jist plain whisky has been enough to wreck me again an' again, an' I know the feelin', bhoy. Ye'd best lave that box stop where ut is."

"No, I must get it again. It will be no fight if I don't."

McGuire looked at him shrewdly. "Do ye hope to win that way, bhoy?"

"It is the only way," answered Neil quickly.

"Ye think so?" The Irishman shook his head. "If I was fightin' the whisky, I wouldn't be lugging a bottle round in the pocket av me. I know I'd soon be outside the craythur. But not havin' ut to hand I'm not throubled by ut; an' I slape quiet av nights. Let slapeing dogs lie, me son."

"No!" Neil laughed harshly as he replied, "I'm going after the box. I'm no man if I can't carry it through unopened."

He picked up a blazing spruce brand, and walked off in the darkness. McGuire watched him, but made no attempt to help in the search.

"Pity he didn't chuck the baste in the river whilst he was about it," he soliloquised.

Then he saw Musgrave stoop, and half a minute later the young man returned to camp with the box in his hand. He held it out for the Irishman's inspection.

"There's my devil, Pat."

"Aw! An' chained with ribbon, or I be dramein'."

"Oh, you're not dreaming," answered Neil with an unsteady laugh.

"There's waker chains than ribbon," said McGuire with quick understanding. "Ye'll forgive me axin', Neil bhoy; but a girl's hand tied that ribbon?"

"Yes!" answered Neil.

"The girl av the pictcher?"

"The same."

"Thin, bhoy, I'll not say but fwhat the box'll hilp ye, afther all! The divil bate woman once, but iver since she's baten him whin she has set out to fight him for a man's soul." He pointed to the box. "'Twas that brought ye up here?"

"Yes!"

"The girl sint ye?"

"No. It was my own idea. I hoped to win out, and carry that box to her and say—— But now——"

A second time he broke off, and glanced at the picture paper lying where he had thrown it an hour before. The Irishman divined what was in his mind.

"Bhoy," he asked quickly, "fwhat if that rumour was no rumour, but the truth? What thin? Would ye give in or——"

"Before God, no! I'll fight it out. I owe it to myself now. I'll stick it to the bitter end."

"Thin, me son, ye naden't worry. Ye'll come through. An' ye naden't think ill av the girl, for with a face like that she's no light-av-love. Shove that thing in yer pocket an' come an' slape now. Ye've less cause to worry than many a man with half your throuble; for ye can fight; an' there's more hilp in fightin'—jist fightin'—a throuble than most prastes know. Lie ye down, bhoy, lie ye down, an' drame av the girl."

Neil Musgrave laid him down, but he did not sleep. Lying quite still, he gave himself up to thought, and in the long watches of the night an idea came to him—an idea which he turned over in his mind again and again. The more he considered it, the more he was attracted by it; and when he arose in the morning he had already taken a secret resolution.

"Pat," he said over breakfast, "when we get down to Dawson we must dissolve partnership."

"Now fwhat the——"

"I'm sorry, Pat, but it must be so. I feel that the way I'm on won't do. Two or three times lately I've nearly given way. I want restraint, responsibility or discipline—yes, discipline—that's the thing——"

"If ye'll tell me fwhat ye're afther, bhoy, maybe me head'll stop whirlin'."

"Before I came out here I went to see a swell physician in London about my—my complaint. He suggested the restraint of a home for drug-eaters or the discipline of a Trappist monastery. I didn't cotton on to either of these ideas, believing I could win out without, but now I can see his point. Restraint, discipline——"

"Bhoy, dy'e mane ye're going to one av them praste-houses?"

"No," laughed Neil, as he looked at the wonder in the other's face, "but I'm going to seek sanctuary for all that!"

"Can't ye be plain about it?"

"No! It's a secret yet."

"'Tis a good one, I'll wager," said the Irishman, looking at him with thoughtful eyes. "I can see that by the look on the face av ye. But ye can tell me one thing. Are ye going to lave the North?"

"No! No!"

"Thin, me bhoy, I'll be bumpin' up against ye sometimes whin the trails cross; but 'tis sorry I'll be to lose ye, mortal sorry. Yet I'll not say ye no; for a man has to fight in his own way, an' whether the way's good or bad none can tell the ind; but belave me, bhoy, if it ut hilp ye, I'd walk bearfoot through the Barrens in winter."

And having thus expressed himself, with a desire to hide his emotion, the Irishman rose suddenly and left the camp, whilst Neil watched him go with eyes that were bright with sudden moisture.

CHAPTER VI

FATEFUL WORDS

FOLLOWING the departure of Neil Musgrave, Miss Betty Marlowe found that her pleasure in the London season was slackening, and she was secretly pleased when, a fortnight later, her aunt announced a rather sudden intention of returning immediately to Ottawa.

"I hope you don't mind very much, Betty," said her aunt, "but there is a matter which is worrying me, and about which I want to see Mr. Bouchard at once. It is really very important."

Betty shook her head. "I do not mind at all, auntie. One gets rather tired of the constant rush of gaiety over here."

"Then we will sail next week," said Mrs. Cathcart, without volunteering any precise explanation of the matter which had occasioned her sudden change of plan.

For her part, Betty thought little of it. Mr. Bouchard was her aunt's lawyer and one of the trustees of her own estate, and quite naturally she concluded that some matter of business demanded their early return. That the business concerned herself she had not the faintest notion; but such was the case. On the day previous to the announcement of her decision to return Mrs. Cathcart had paid a call upon an old friend, and from her had received rather disquieting information.

"Who do you think called here yesterday?" asked her friend over the teacups.

"I am sure I don't know, Myra," replied Mrs. Cathcart, without any particular interest.

"You couldn't guess if you tried for a month," said her hostess, with something in her manner that quickened Mrs. Cathcart's interest.

"Who was it?"

"Jim Andover!"

"Jim Andover. Do you mean——"

"Yes—the Jim. He hasn't been to see me before for at least five years, not since my husband died, at any rate, and naturally I wondered what had brought him. It did not take me very long to find out. He had come to inquire about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, about you and your niece. He seemed to be particularly interested in Betty. He made inquiries about her parentage and so forth."

"What did you tell him?" asked Mrs. Cathcart, trying to keep out of her voice the apprehension she was conscious of.

"The truth, of course," laughed her friend. "I explained that she was the orphaned child of your brother, and that you were her guardian. There was no reason why he should not know, was there?"

"None whatever!" answered Mrs. Cathcart, and the relief she felt would have been plain to her friend if she had not at that moment been pouring out tea.

"What did he say?"

"He said he didn't know that Barnsdale was dead, and was under the impression that he was childless; but of course, as he explained, he had had no communication with your family since he received the news of his wife's death."

"And that is twenty years ago," commented Mrs. Cathcart.

"Dear me—so it is! How the time goes! . . . He didn't stay long after asking his questions, from which I guessed that it was out of no regard for me that he had called."

"And it was out of none for me or Betty?" answered Mrs. Cathcart, a trifle grimly. "Jim Andover never cared a straw for anybody but himself."

"No, but he was genuinely interested in your niece. I could see that."

"Indeed!"

It was that interest which had given birth to Mrs. Cathcart's decision to leave England. Major Andover's interest in her niece was disquieting to her, and as there were very good reasons why her niece should have nothing to do with the Major, she determined to remove her out of his reach at the earliest possible moment. Hence her decision to return to Ottawa, a decision which led her to book passages for Betty and herself on the first boat for Halifax.

As events befell, however, the flight itself availed nothing. Neither Betty nor her aunt was a good sailor, and for the first three days of a rather stormy passage they were forced to keep their cabins; but on the fourth, as they entered the dining saloon for lunch, the first person Mrs. Cathcart saw was Major Andover, sitting near the head of the captain's table, and by his side Maurice Endicott. As she met the Major's eyes Mrs. Cathcart turned coldly away as if he were the veriest stranger, but she was conscious of acute dismay. Her niece immediately noticed that she had grown pale, and inquired anxiously:

"Auntie, are you not feeling well?"

"I shall be better in a moment, thank you, Betty," replied Mrs. Cathcart, seating herself.

"The saloon seems a trifle stuffy after the fresh air on deck." She glanced casually up the table, and then back to her niece. "Maurice Endicott sails with us, it seems."

Betty started, and looking hastily up the table, met the young man's smiling eyes. He bowed to her, and she bowed back, a little flush coming into her face as she did so. Her aunt noticed the flush, but made no comment upon it.

"I wonder what takes Maurice Endicott to Canada? I saw his mother the day before we sailed; and if she knew he was leaving England she did not tell me."

Betty laughed. "Probably she did not know. The young men of this age snip the apron-strings early."

"I do not like the company he keeps," said Mrs. Cathcart, after a pause. "That man—Major. Andover—can be no good influence for one of Maurice's age. I should be very unhappy to see them so friendly—if he were my son!" She broke off, and after another long pause said abruptly: "Betty, if Maurice Endicott desires to introduce Major Andover, I want you to decline the introduction."

"Very well, auntie," replied Betty, unable to conceal her wonder.

"You need have no fear of hurting the Major's feelings. I think he will not be at all surprised if you refuse, for he will understand the reason quite well."

"Better than I shall," answered Betty with a smile.

"There is no reason that you should understand at all, Betty," replied her aunt, a little severely. "You must trust my judgment. The less you know about Major Andover the better; and I

hope to goodness the man has sufficient decency not to try and intrude upon us ; but I doubt it."

Apparently Major Andover had a larger store of decency than Mrs. Cathcart hoped, for he made no attempt to approach either of them. With Maurice Endicott, however, it was otherwise. The moment they left the table he hurried after them.

"Mrs. Cathcart—Miss Marlowe, this is a pleasure!"

"An unexpected one?" asked Mrs. Cathcart with a smile, though there was that in her voice which made her niece look at her quickly.

"Hadn't the slightest notion that you were on board until we had left Ireland, and shouldn't have known it then if Andover had not happened to ask for the passenger list."

"Ah! And was it a surprise to Major Andover?"

"Yes, I think so! He recognised your names and pointed them out to me. But you don't know him, Mrs. Cathcart, do you?"

As he asked his question Maurice Endicott looked round as if for his friend, and Mrs. Cathcart hastily intervened.

"Don't I? I knew him when you had not yet reached the dignity of Etons; and after so long acquaintance with him I don't speak to him; which is a good example for your mother's son if you only knew it."

"Oh, Mrs. Cathcart, I say——" began the young man, but the lady interrupted brusquely.

"I don't care what you say, Maurice. I know what I am talking about, and I must ask you not to introduce your friend to Betty."

"I certainly shall not do anything that you do not wish, Mrs. Cathcart," replied Maurice Endicott, who, as Betty saw, was very surprised at her aunt's extreme attitude.

"Then if that is quite understood, you can come

with us and arrange my rugs for me if you like. I should like to talk with you for a little while."

Maurice Endicott accepted the invitation with alacrity. He cared little about Mrs. Cathcart's attitude to his friend, since it was no affair of his; whilst he welcomed the opportunity of spending some time in Betty's company. But as events befell they afforded him but little satisfaction, for when he had attended to her comfort Mrs. Cathcart demanded all his attention.

"And now, Maurice, tell me why you are going to Canada with Major Andover?"

The direct question, though he might have anticipated it, startled Endicott, and he boggled over the reply.

"Oh—er—well, you know, one gets a little—er—tired of civilisation at times."

As he made this reply a little incredulous laugh came from Mrs. Cathcart, and he saw Betty glance at him curiously.

"I should not have suspected you of anything of the sort," said Mrs. Cathcart. "You are going to the wilds, then?"

"Yes, to the wilds—the Rockies, after grizzlies and big game generally, you know."

"I did not know that you went in for sport, Maurice."

"Oh, I don't as a rule. But the Major wanted a pal, and I thought it would be a nice change."

"It will most certainly be a change for you," laughed Mrs. Cathcart, "and a healthy one, I should imagine. It is to be entirely a shooting trip, I suppose."

"Entirely—yes."

Mrs. Cathcart's eyes narrowed a little, and she sat for a moment without speaking, her mind busy with the piece of gossip which had decided her to

leave England. She had her own ideas of the object of Major Andover's trip, even of his choice of companion, and she was not satisfied with Endicott's explanation. When she spoke again her question was a direct one.

"I suppose Andover has no other object than the shooting of grizzly bears?"

The result of the question was a little startling. As he heard it a light of apprehension flashed in Maurice Endicott's eyes, the blood surging in his face, and then receded, leaving it very pale, and his stammering reply was altogether unconvincing to Mrs. Cathcart's ears.

"Er—none whatever—that I know of. What other object could he have on a shooting trip?"

Mrs. Cathcart looked at him with steady eyes, and he flinched a little under their gaze. Then she spoke again:

"I do not think I believe you, Maurice. You have some other object in making this journey."

The directness of this charge braced Endicott and helped him to recover himself. Assuring himself that the lady could not have the slightest suspicion of the real purpose of Andover and himself, he managed to laugh.

"Really, Mrs. Cathcart, you are a little unkind in not accepting my word. We *are* going on a shooting trip; though I don't say that if we stumble on a gold mine we shall not avail ourselves of it. If the papers are to be believed, fortunes are made every day in the North."

"You are going North, then?"

"Yes, straight through to Edmonton and then on to the rugged wilds. That is the programme. We shall not spend a single day in the East."

Unnoticed by either of her companions, Mrs. Cathcart gave a little sigh of relief. If this pro-

gramme of Major Andover's journey was the correct one, then the fear which her friend's gossip had given rise to was groundless, and she need not have made such haste to leave England. She still had her doubts that sport was the sole object of the Major's journey ; the strange look on Endicott's face at her question had left her unconvinced on that point, but her own immediate fears were removed ; and she cared nothing for anything which did not concern her niece and herself. She smiled a little as she replied :

"Then you certainly must be a very ardent sportsman !"

"Well, Andover is ; but of course I am quite a novice."

"Yes ! The more reason why you should be careful not to let Major Andover teach you too much."

This rather cryptic utterance plainly disturbed Endicott.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Cathcart."

"No ? Well, perhaps you will some day," replied the lady with a down-rightness that left the man whom she addressed dumb.

Mrs. Cathcart ceased to talk, and Betty was apparently absorbed in her book. The situation was more than a little uncomfortable, and presently excusing himself, Endicott went off to find the Major. He discovered him in the smoke-room engaged in a game of brag, and when the game ended, having held good cards, Andover was in a cheerful mood.

"Well, Maurice, my boy, how goes the wooing ?"

"Badly !" answered Endicott, and then asked the question which he had been waiting to ask. "I say, Major, why is Mrs. Cathcart so down on you ?"

"Is she down on me ?" asked Andover.

"I should just think she is."

"Well," replied the Major genially, "she may think she has her reasons. You see, she and I are relations, and relations are proverbially hard on one another."

"Relations! I hadn't the ghost of an idea!"

"No? Well, it's a fact. Mrs. Cathcart is my sister-in-law, and as my marriage was not a glowing success, it is possible that the lady is prejudiced against me. Quite naturally she takes the side of her dead sister, who was my wife."

A mingled look of understanding and relief came on the younger man's face. "Oh!" he cried, "that explains it!"

"Explains what, Endicott?"

"Mrs. Cathcart's curiosity about our journey. She doesn't quite seem to swallow the idea of a hunting trip; and when just now she asked me if you had no other object in this journey, it gave me quite a shake up. I wondered if she had guessed——"

"S-s-s-h! How could she? How could any one? Don't get such foolish ideas in your head. No doubt she thought that I was going to interfere in family affairs."

"Yes! That is the explanation. I can see it now—but, of course, I didn't know at the time that you were related. She lost interest when I said we were going straight through to Edmonton!"

"She did—did she?" Major Andover's own interest increased with this information. "Now that is rather curious, my boy. One would think that there might be matters that would pay a discarded relation like myself to look into. I must think the matter over. My relations by marriage are evidently a little afraid of my taking too close an interest in their affairs. Now, I wonder why?"

In the next few days the Major spent quite a considerable time upon this question, but found no satisfactory answer to it; and when they arrived at Halifax he was still vexing his mind upon it. But in the bustle of landing and entraining, he dismissed it; and did not recall it until long afterwards. With cynical amusement he watched his companion attending to the comfort of the two ladies, and when he returned to the coach where their own sleeping berths were located, he chaffed him on his endeavours.

"Such devoted service should not fail of its reward," he said. "Is the fair one melting yet?"

"Melting! No, she is like an icicle."

"Then the service goes for nothing?"

"Absolutely. I don't believe she even thinks of it."

"That is unfortunate," said the Major sympathetically. "But the matter will right itself in a little while. When other interests are—er—removed, you will come to your own. You must live in hope and—er—keep your powder dry."

The Major laughed at his own jest, which in view of the secret object of their journey was grim enough; but his laughter found no response in Maurice Endicott. When his companion had shown him Betty Marlowe's name in the passenger-list, high hopes had kindled within him. A sea voyage together would offer unusual opportunities, and he would, he felt, be able to advance himself in Betty's esteem; but partly owing to the roughness of the passage, and partly to the fact that Betty had kept very closely to her aunt, favourable opportunities had been rare, and disappointment had been his portion. But as the great express thundered on its way a real opportunity of service was granted to him; which he did not fail to use to the full.

In the night, encountering a fall of rock on the line, the train was wrecked. The shock of the collision threw both Endicott and the Major from their sleeping-berths, and as the light went out, and they scrambled to their feet, shrieks of fear and wails of agony filled the night.

"What is it?" asked the younger man, still only half awake.

"An accident," said the Major coolly. "Sounds as if the train were wrecked. Put on some things, and let us see what can be done."

Endicott began to grope for his clothes, and was so engaged when a sleeping-car attendant hurried in carrying an electric torch. His face was grey and there was a wild look in his eyes.

"All right here, gentlemen?" he cried excitedly, and then gave the explanation. "A cliff has tumbled on the line—and we took it full speed. Half the train is buckled. Make haste and hurry, and see what you can do! Listen to those people—poor creatures. Their car——" He threw up a hand expressively and hurried on.

Maurice Endicott also hurried. Long before the Major was ready he had dropped out on the line and was running towards the sleeping-coach where Mrs. Cathcart and her niece were berthed. When he reached it others were already there, and in the light of lamps and torches he saw that the steel car was wrecked. Cries and groans issued from its crumpled mass, and as he heard them Maurice Endicott's face went white with fear for the girl who he knew was within. Selfish as he was, actively evil, moved by mercenary desires, he yet had a very real passion for Betty Marlowe, and in the hour of disaster his passion lifted him to great heights. With others he worked frantically, helping to remove the dead and injured, and it was with

stony eyes he saw Mrs. Cathcart lifted from the wreck, white and still, with a little trickle of blood running from her temple. He knew instinctively that she was dead, and he did not look at her again.

"That's the last, I guess," said a railway man with a torch emerging from the wreckage.

"No!" cried Endicott. "No! there's another. A girl! I know."

The railway man turned back, and Endicott followed him, climbing over the wreckage of berths and seats and scattered luggage and splintered steel towards the farther end. The man thrust his torch forward as they came to a mass of wreckage that blocked their way; and both followed the beam of light.

"She's there!" cried Endicott.

"You're right, boss," said the man, "but whether alive or dead——"

"Miss Marlowe! Miss Marlowe!" cried the young man in an agony of fear.

"Here! Here! Help!"

"Alive," said Endicott, looking at the man. "Give me your torch; I'm going in."

For reply the man flashed his torch at the tangle in front of them. At this point the roof of the coach had collapsed, and a portion of it was supported by one or two flimsy rods and stays. Whoever entered would have to do so on hands and knees, and a touch of the flimsy stays would mean disaster.

"The man who goes in there goes with his life on a hair."

"I'm going. Give me the torch. We can't leave a girl there!"

"No, boss, but——"

He got no further with his objection. Endicott snatched the torch from his hand, and dropping down on his stomach, began to make his way into

the cavern beyond. It was dangerous work, but to do him justice he never thought of the danger. Little by little, over and through the amazing jumble of litter and wreckage he wormed his way, flashing his torch and occasionally crying out to hearten the girl for whom he was risking his life, and in something like seven minutes had reached the place where she lay.

She was lying almost flat with part of the wreckage of the berth across her legs, unable to move because of the incubus.

"You?" she cried. "You?"

"Yes, I—Betty," he answered quickly. "Are you hurt?"

"No, but I can't move."

"I will soon alter that," he said, and set to work.

In a minute or two he had released her, and then he explained the situation.

"You must follow me carefully," he said. "There is rather acute danger of this whole box of tricks collapsing, and if it does——"

He broke off significantly, and the girl understood.

"I will be very careful," she replied.

They began to make their way out, the girl following, Endicott indicating the points of especial danger. Presently they reached the exit, where he helped her to descend. Now that the danger was over Betty felt herself giving way, and was only saved from falling by Endicott's arm. She made an effort to recover her self-control, and looking round asked: "My aunt! Where is she?"

"Your aunt——" began Endicott, then stopped, and started afresh. "I am . . . afraid . . . your aunt . . ."

"Oh!" cried Betty, understanding what he shrank from telling her. "She is dead?"

He did not answer, but she saw the confirmation of her fear in his face, and as the realisation of the truth came upon her, she fainted.

With the return of consciousness she looked round. She was lying on a seat in one of the unwrecked coaches, and a woman was bending over her administering brandy. Other people were moving about, and only a little way from her an injured woman was moaning, whilst another was babbling hysterically. But through the medley of sounds one voice reached her clear and distinctly.

"You've done the trick, Endicott. The heroic card is always a good one to play with a woman. Once we've cleared Musgrave out, you'll ramp home for the matrimonial stakes."

She moved her head slightly, and saw Major Andover talking to Maurice Endicott. Her brain was far from clear, and the figures of the two men seemed to sway before her eyes; but nevertheless the words registered themselves indelibly on the tablets of her memory, and though for the moment they passed to seeming oblivion, they were there waiting to spring into new and significant life.

CHAPTER VII

THE SANCTUARY OF ACTION

WHEN Neil Musgrave left his partner at Dawson he worked his way southward to the sanctuary that he sought—the Mounted Police Barracks at Regina. It was a true instinct that took him there, and never once, when as a trooper he sweated in stables, or as a recruit fagged at drill that he had learned in his school-days, did he question the wisdom of his action. And his deliverance from the thralldom of barracks came

sooner than usual, for that year there was a shortage of men in the force, and a greater demand to fill up vacancies in the scattered posts, so with the first snow he found himself being interviewed by the assistant commissioner, a keen-eyed man with a large understanding of the men beneath him. The officer went to the point at once.

"Musgrave, you have some acquaintance with the Yukon district."

"A little," answered Neil. "I came from up there to enlist."

"Yes, I know, and now you are to go back there." As he spoke the assistant commissioner saw a light of gladness leap in Musgrave's eyes and knew that he had found a man who was not afraid of exile in the North. "We have an almost new post at Taklin Bluff. It is a small affair—a corporal and two troopers. One of the latter has fallen ill and is coming to Regina. You are to take his place. I should have preferred to send a more experienced man, but I simply haven't one to spare, and I think you'll do."

"I shall do my best, sir."

"Haven't a doubt of it, Musgrave. But you'll find it rather a lonely job, I'm afraid. It's no joke living through the winter on the edge of the Arctic Circle with few of the amenities of civilisation. I know, for I've done it; but after all"—the assistant commissioner gave a short laugh—"Taklin cannot be as bad as Herschel Island or Fullerton; and in my time I have served the full term at both of these posts."

He was silent for a brief time, and a light of reminiscence came into his steel-blue eyes. Then he turned to some papers on his desk, searched among them and took up one of them. He sat for a moment holding it in his hand reading it, then he looked up.

"You'll have work to do," he said. "All this year there has been trouble among the Indians of the Macmillan district, and like most Indian trouble, it has its inspiration in rye whisky. Some one is running the whisky into the North, which of course is an offence against the law of the Territory, and the trading of it to the Indians is an even greater offence. Now this whisky-trading has got to be stopped, and the men who engage in it brought to justice. It is a large order, I know, for three men in the wilderness of the Macmillan; but it's the sort of job that's set for us, and it's not often we fail. And I have here a name that may help you and the others at Taklin Bluff. That there's a gang at work is pretty evident, for no one man could carry the thing through himself; but only one man is so far suspect, and he is known by the soubriquet of Ginger Bob."

"Ginger Bob!"

As Neil Musgrave echoed the name the officer looked at him quickly. "You know this man, Musgrave?"

"I have met him!" answered Neil with a smile. "He is a bully and a rotter."

"Tell me how you came to meet him?"

Briefly Musgrave gave an account of his advent at the Mikado Opera House at Cedar Forks and of the fight that had followed, and when he ended the assistant commissioner gave a dry laugh.

"Apparently my choice was better than I knew, Musgrave. You're the very man for the job, and I fancy Ginger Bob's days of freedom are already numbered. But you must be careful. From the account given to me, this fellow is a desperado; one of the old style who used to find their refuge in Montana or the pan-handle of Texas. There are a few of them left, and the Klondyke has lured

them North. This man is of that breed, and cunning as well as desperate. I understand he locates himself somewhere across the Alaskan border, so you'll have to get him on one of his journeys into the Territory. You'll need to get absolute proof of his connection with the whisky-running, and then get hold of him how and when you can. It will take time, I have no doubt ; but it has to be done, you understand ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ I will send written instructions to Corporal Tredholt that you are to be detailed for this particular work ; and you will start to-morrow with the detachment that is going up to Fort Chipwyman. That is all, I think. Good morning—and good hunting, Musgrave.”

The officer smiled as he gave his adieu, and after returning it and saluting, Neil Musgrave withdrew. Outside, in the snow of the barrack square, he almost danced with delight. To be delivered from the routine of stables and the barrack square was a relief long desired ; but to be sent directly to one of the Northern outposts on definite and dangerous work was beyond all his expectations. As he made his way to his quarters he hummed a gay little song to himself, and put a hand to the belt where from its place of repose the dragon-lidded box pressed against his body. It had troubled him little in the last few weeks, and now, with the prospect of action, excitement and danger before him, he felt delivered from the bondage that it symbolised. He had endured discipline, and that, as he was conscious, had helped enormously ; now he was to carry responsibility, and that, with the action for which he craved, would break his bondage altogether.

In his quarters he found a letter awaiting him with the London postmark. It was from the lawyer who,

as one of the trustees of his grandfather's estate, paid the allowance due to him—the only person belonging to the circle of his old life who knew his present location. Opening it, he found the quarterly cheque with the usual brief note and the receipt awaiting his signature, with another letter unopened, the sight of which brought the blood to his face. It was in a feminine handwriting and bore a Canadian stamp. Never in his life before had he seen Betty Marlowe's writing, but he had no doubt that she was the writer, and eagerly he tore open the envelope and extracted the letter. His first glance was for the signature. It was signed quite simply, "Betty." He looked at the date and saw that it was four months old, and then he began to read.

"MY DEAR NEIL,—I am writing this letter after long and earnest thought. I do not know where you are or how you are getting on; but if this finds you, I want you to come to me as soon as you can make it convenient, or at least to write to me. I feel that in sending you away as I did I was too hard on you, and that I ought to have helped you instead of leaving you to your own unaided efforts. I spoke of risks as if I shrank from them; but having considered the matter carefully, I feel, loving you as I do (There! what will you think of me?) that I ought not to shrink, and I am willing to face those risks that I may help you; and that we may overcome them together. In this relation I have no doubt of myself, and none whatever of you, and together, Neil, we should triumph.

"Since returning from England I have had great trouble. Aunt and I were in the boat express from Halifax that was wrecked, of which perhaps you read; and aunt was killed. I was not injured,

though I was pinned under the wreckage, and was helped out by, whom do you think?—Maurice Endicott. He and his friend Major Andover were in the train, and the former crawled under the wreckage to help me, at great personal risk. Both of them were very kind to me; but somehow I cannot feel grateful. I distrust them. When they thought I was unconscious I overheard something which, the more I think of it, fills me with a greater disquiet.

“Neil, I think they mean some harm to you. I know you will laugh at this, and ask yourself why they should seek your hurt; but I am convinced they do—and if there is no other reason there is this one—twice Maurice Endicott has asked me to marry him, and on each occasion he had shown his jealousy of you. That is nothing, you will say, or at least it is only natural; but why should Major Andover be interested in your doings and in your whereabouts? After our arrival in Ottawa he asked me many questions about you, and in an oblique way endeavoured to learn if I knew your whereabouts. I did not and do not know it, so he learned nothing from me. But I have learned something about him. He is an evil man. In Ottawa I saw a man who is not too particular cut him dead; and a cousin of mine was very upset when he learned that I had been in his company. My poor aunt did not like him, and would not acknowledge him, though I gather that twenty years ago they had been close acquaintances. Again you will say to yourself that these things are nothing to you, that they afford no ground for fear of personal harm, but you did not hear what I heard. ‘Once we have cleared Musgrave out—’ I heard the Major say—and ever since I have been afraid of his meaning. I cannot believe that which

I fear, and which I dare not put into words. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that I dreamed the words, or that they were a figment born of the disorder of my mind just after the accident—but I cannot succeed.

"I know I heard them, and the thought of what may be behind them fills me with fear for you. I beg of you to be very careful. I do not know where you are, and I am sending this letter to your lawyer in London, in the hope that it will find you, and if it does, you will know how I think of you, how I regret having sent you away to fight alone, when by your side I might have helped you with my love. Write to me soon.

" BETTY."

When he finished the first reading of the letter Neil Musgrave turned the sheets over and read the beginning afresh. Then he stopped. There was a tender look on his face and his eyes were radiant with dreams. He began to walk to and fro in the deserted barrack-room with quick strides, considering the matter in the first paragraph of the letter, fighting down the great desire within him. At the end of quarter of an hour the battle was won.

"No, my dear," he said aloud, looking down at the letter as if into Betty's face. "No, you were right. This is a risk that no girl should take—and you shall not take it. When I come to you, there shall be no risk for you. I will be very sure of myself—first."

Then the rest of the letter claimed his attention. He read it through again, carefully, and a puzzled look came on his face. Betty's fear was quite beyond his understanding. He searched the past carefully for any reason that might give significance to Betty's fear of Major Andover's attitude towards himself,

and found nothing. Andover had been little more to him than a casual acquaintance, introduced by Maurice Endicott, and search as he would he could find no ground for Betty's alarm. He looked again at the words which she was convinced she had heard. "Once we have cleared Musgrave out——" They might mean anything; that they had any particular significance he could not bring himself to believe, and in the end, being inclined to consider them as some mental distortion of other words, actually heard when Betty was in an overwrought condition, he dismissed them from his mind.

"I must write," he whispered to himself, "write and reassure her, and tell her that in a year, when——when——"

His face grew thoughtful, and his eyes kindled with the light of dreams. For quite a long time he stood there, dreaming of the future. Then a trooper came into the room.

"Musgrave," said the new-comer, "Q.M.S. Gaddy wants you. You've to draw outfit and stores for the journey to-morrow. Going North, aren't you?"

"Yes—to Taklin Bluff."

The trooper looked out of the window. It was snowing again, and he jerked his head to indicate the fact.

"It'll be the deuce of a journey after you leave the rail. Snow here means that up there the winter has set in good and hard. You'll have to do a good half the journey on snowshoes. I don't envy you."

"No?" Musgrave laughed. "But you see, Farland, I envy myself. I am glad to go."

"Oh, well, if that's the sort of thing you like, well and good. I am content without going out in the wilderness to look for frozen toes."

They left the room together; and thereafter Neil Musgrave was so busy preparing for the morrow's journey and for a sojourn in the wilds, that he had no time to spare for correspondence. And so it fell out that his reply to Betty's letter was not written until just before the latter part of the journey began and then was entrusted for posting to a fellow-trooper who put it in his pocket and promptly forgot all about it for a whole fortnight.

Ignorant of this, and happy in the thought that Betty would have received news of him, five weeks later, in the teeth of a snowstorm that drove the shot-like particles cuttingly in their faces, the police party reached the isolated post at Taklin Bluff where Neil was to leave it. The two men at the post received them with the hospitality of the North, and whilst the wind and snow beat against the log-shack, and the pine logs in the stove roared, diffusing welcome light and heat, the law-bringers of the Northern wild spent the hours in jest and song and story. One of the men had been of the detachment which had been sent to the Klondyke when the first gold rush began, and the stories he had of these strenuous days was legion. One which he told was of particular interest to Neil Musgrave.

"Skagway at that time," said the narrator, "was just a pocket edition of inferno. A fellow called Soapy Smith ran the town, with a gang of as tough ruffians as the Territories ever knew. They were the sweepings up of Nevada, Montana and the Washington State, cattle-rustlers, gun-men and crooks of every sort, and murder and robbery were rife. Skagway itself was supposed to be under the jurisdiction of a United States marshal, but he did nothing to check Soapy's activities, and we of the police posted on the summits had our hands full in keeping the scum from crossing the Dominion

border. We weren't always successful, and now and again one of these cattle got through, though sometimes they were sent out again. The fellow I'm telling about was one of these. In Skagway, where he was one of the rustling gang, until somebody had the good sense to shoot Soapy Smith in the street, he went by the name of 'Ginger Bob '—"

"Ginger Bob!"

The exclamation came from Neil Musgrave and the narrator turned to him.

"Know him, Musgrave?"

"I met him at Cedar Forks last spring. We had a fight and I laid him out."

"Then, my son, you'd better walk delicately. 'Ginger Bob's' a tough proposition. He hasn't the scruples of a New Guinea cannibal. He'll get square with you if he can, and he won't be above using his gun on the quiet."

"So I have heard," answered Neil quietly.

"I wonder if he is up here now?"

"Must be! I'm detailed to look out for him, and rope him in. He's suspected of whisky-running and trading it among the Indians in this district."

"It's about the most innocent of his activities," said the other with a laugh. "And to think that I once saved his life!"

"You saved his life?"

"Yes. It was the winter after Soapy Smith had deceased at Skagway. I was bringing the mail out with an Indian guide, when about the middle of the day we saw a man staggering down the trail in front of us. He travelled oddly, sometimes making little rushes, sometimes just hurrying, and so far as we could see he'd no sort of outfit. He was perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead of us, when he broke into another of his runs, only this time he zig-zagged

across the trail, and as he started his capers, from down trail came the sound of a rifle shot, and half a minute later there came another crack. Somebody was shooting at the man in front, which accounted for his antics and zig-zagging, and as you can guess I drove the dogs for all they were worth. Two more shots sounded before we overtook the fellow, but by that time I had reached the idea that whoever was firing hadn't the least intention of hitting the fellow, for if they'd really meant it they couldn't have missed him, making the mark he did against the snow.

"That in itself seemed very odd, but the explanation appeared when we came up with him. Then we found that his hands were tied behind his back, and that round his neck was slung a board on which some artist had scrawled 'Ginger Bob, Cache-thief. Pass him along.'

"I guessed then that the shots were only meant to frighten him, sort of spur-pricks to hurry him on, because at the beginning of the Klondyke rush thieves and blackguards were often turned loose that way. He was glad to see us, for he was in a tight fix, and would have frozen or starved to death long before he reached civilisation; but the first thing he did when I cut his bonds was to turn to the bank whence the shots had come, and shaking his fist, curse steadily for five minutes. The tortures he promised his tormentors would have made a stone image shiver; and at last I chipped in, and told him to cut it short if he didn't want to be left there to freeze. That shut him up, and we took him on to Skagway, where he was so unwelcome that they gave him twenty-four hours to quit. I heard afterwards that he did so at the geepole of another man's dog-team, which he stole while the owner was in a store. Haven't heard of

him since—till to-night, and had concluded he'd met his deserts or had removed his activities to the Southland. But if he's up here again and you're to get him, well, all I've got to say is that you've your work cut out, Musgrave. He'll shoot before he'll go to Stony Mountain Penitentiary."

"But I will get him—if he's to be got, alive or dead."

"It will have to be alive," laughed the narrator of the story, "unless you want a black mark against you at Regina. They've no use for dead prisoners down there—and the Force doesn't shoot except in the last extremity."

"I know," answered Neil, "and I shall exercise due discretion, but I'll get him if he's to be got."

And as he leaned forward to the stove to secure a light for his pipe, a resolute look came on his clear-cut face.

CHAPTER VIII

VISITORS FOR GINGER BOB

ABOUT the time that the policeman was telling the story of Ginger Bob's early career in the North, that worthy was seated in a cabin on a little-used tributary of the Stewart River. With him was another man who was partner with him in his illicit operations, and the two were discussing a contemplated journey with the forbidden whisky, when from outside there came a sudden yelping of dogs and the crunch of a sled as it drew up outside the cabin.

"Christopher ! Here's callers !" exclaimed Ginger Bob's companion. "Who in thunder——"

He stopped and looked at his partner with something like consternation in his eyes. Ginger Bob

shook his head and gave an abrupt laugh of contempt.

"Don't be so funky, Jim. 'Tain't the Mounters. We'd have heard their bells."

"Trew! Blamed if I ever thought of that. But who the deuce can it be? This is off the main trail, an' afternoon callers ain't used to droppin' in."

"We'll see in a minute. They're loosing the dogs an——"

A whipstock rapping on the door interrupted him, and then a hand fumbled with the primitive latch-string. A moment later the door opened, and Ginger Bob shot a quick scrutinising glance at the man standing in the doorway. Then a look of relief came on his own face, for though he had spoken so confidently to his companion he himself had suffered a doubt as to who might be making this unexpected call. But the man before him wore none of the insignia of the Mounted Police, and relief from momentary apprehension found expression in the roughness of his greeting.

"Step in, stranger, an' shut that blamed door. Yer don't want to freeze the marrow of us, do yer?"

"No," answered the stranger in a cultured voice, "but there's a pair of us——"

"Then the pair of you shut the blamed door."

The stranger stepped into the cabin, followed by another man, who closed the door and dropped the latch behind him, then turned to look at the owners of the place. At him also Ginger Bob shot a single scrutinising glance, saw that he was a much younger man than the other and that, like his companion, he seemed innocent of any connection with the law-givers of the North; then he addressed himself to the first comer.

"Say, Colonel, what brings you up here?"

Major Andover, for he it was, was startled by this

form of address, but a second later guessing that his interlocutor was from the States and remembering that America sprouts colonels as a tree leaf-buds, he smiled.

"We lost the trail in the snowstorm this morning, and seeing your cabin thought that we might rest here for the night, and at the same time get some information as to our whereabouts."

"Strangers up here then—hey?" asked Ginger Bob.

"As you say—strangers."

Ginger Bob waved a none too clean hand in a half-circle.

"You're welcome to this shelter, Colonel. We ken bunk yer, but we can't feed yer, for the grub-box is low. This ain't the Waldorf which by the look an' talk of yer is yere usual style."

"Well, I have been in the Waldorf," laughed Major Andover, "but——"

"Knew it!" said Ginger Bob, smiting his knee. "Tumbled to it as soon as yer opened out ter talk."

"But as I was going to say, a cabin in the woods up here, when one's benighted and lost, is worth a truck-load of Waldorfs in New York. And the grub need not trouble you. We have ample stores of our own."

"Then fetch them in, Colonel, an' get busy. The freedom of the location is yours."

Major Andover turned to his companion. "Do you mind, Maurice?"

"Not in the least—er—Colonel," answered Maurice Endicott, with a look of understanding as he gave the title.

Major Andover nodded his comprehension of the fact that their identity was to be concealed, and then turned towards the stove and began to slip off his furs. Ginger Bob watched him

curiously, and when he had finished offered comment.

"Guess yere the real article, Colonel. You hev the stamp of it! British, ain't yer?"

"Yes!"

"Up here after gold, I guess?"

"No," said Major Andover, in no way resenting a curiosity that was only natural. "I'm up here after a man."

Ginger Bob's eyes narrowed, and the man Jim, who had not as yet spoken, made a hasty movement. The Major caught the sound of it and turned to find the man sitting with a pistol in his hand, and a look of black passion on his face.

"What the——"

"Cut it out, Jim. This gentleman's no Mounter," said Ginger Bob sharply. Then he looked at Andover and laughed. "Jim's a bit down on the Mounted perleece. They interfere with his way of getting an honest living. If yer'll jest assure him, Colonel——"

"Oh," laughed Andover, grasping the situation, "I'm no policeman—and I want nothing to do with one. Your friend——"

"Pardner!" interrupted Ginger Bob genially.

"Your partner need not worry himself on that score."

"Thar! Hear him, Jim? Put up that gun, an' calm yere nerves."

The man Jim put the pistol away, and Endicott entering at that moment with provisions, no more was said, whilst the preparations for the meal went forward. But when the coffee was made, Ginger Bob spoke again.

"Maybe you'd fancy a drop of cream in that coffee, Colonel?"

"Cream!" Andover laughed. "Well, I might fancy it, but I don't suppose there's a cow within a thousand miles."

"You're wrong there, Colonel. Ther's a small herd up at the Mission on the main river, where the Sisters of St. Marie teach the orphan Indians to sing hymns an' milk an' sew, but this milk ain't their sort. The cow's a tin one, I guess."

Ginger Bob laughed as he finished speaking, and crossing the cabin threw aside a bear-skin which covered a pile of what the Major had supposed to be pelts, but which now stood revealed as kerosene tins. The owner of the cabin took up one of the tins and turned again to the packing-case which served for table. There was a grin on his unprepossessing face.

"Say when, Colonel."

Before either Andover or his companion could protest he had poured a generous amount into the tin coffee pot.

"Guess you'll find that a darn sight more comfortin' than cow-juice."

As the odour of the spirit filled the room, Major Andover laughed.

"Whisky?" he asked.

"Best rye—straight through from the States." The Major glanced at the stack in the corner, then he laughed again. "You seem to have a good supply—but why in kerosene tins?"

"Well, Colonel, you see the Dominion authorities don't take no stock on anything stronger nor cow-juice; but kerosene ain't prohibited, and so we lessen the risk a bit by packing it so."

Major Andover easily guessed that the pair were whisky-runners, and he made no attempt to hide his thoughts.

"You trade in it, I suppose?"

"Well, we do a bit sometimes, my pardner an' me, when the Mounters ain't too busy nosing round. It pays—but it's a bit risky; an' Jim here gets the

jumps sometimes, same as he did just now, when yer said yer were after a man. I'll lay an ounce to a nickel that Jim thought 'twas him or me you were laying for, which is why he pulled his gun. That so, Jim ? ”

“ Well—— ” began his partner sheepishly, and then broke off with a laugh.

“ I knew it, ” chuckled Ginger Bob, then turned again to Major Andover. “ He's quick with a gun is Jim, 'most as quick as I am myself. But he'd no cause to get jumpy about yer, Colonel. I could see that much from the moment yer entered this caboose. But who's the man yer after, Colonel ? Maybe I know him. ”

The Major paused over his meal, looked at Ginger Bob thoughtfully, and then said quickly. “ Maybe you do. Have you met a man of the name of Musgrave—Neil Musgrave, up here ? ”

“ Not by name, ” answered the whisky-runner, “ nor by anything like it ; but sayin' I haven't met him by name isn't sayin' I haven't met the man hisself. What's he like, this Musgrave ? ”

Andover looked at Maurice Endicott, and held out his hand. “ As it happens I can show you a photograph of him. My friend, Mr. Maurice, was thoughtful enough to bring one with him. ”

Endicott produced the photograph, and the Major considered it a moment, then handed it to the whisky-runner with the comment, “ A passably good likeness. ”

Ginger Bob took it, gave one glance at it, then his face grew purple with passion, his eyes glowed, and he roared, “ That cub of Cedar Forks ! ”

As the whisky runner shouted the words, Andover started. He had no knowledge of Cedar Forks or of anything that had happened there, but it was clear to him that his host had met Neil Musgrave

and that he bore him no good-will. He waited expecting to hear the whisky-runner reveal something further; but the man did not speak. He sat there a picture of wrathful malevolence, a black look on his brutal face, his eyes glaring at the photograph. After what seemed a long time of waiting, the Major himself broke the silence.

"It seems that you recognise the photograph! You have seen the original?"

"Seen the——"

A string of vile oaths followed, to which the Major listened quite unperturbed; though once he shot a meaning glance at his companion. At the end the whisky-runner suddenly turned his glaring eyes upon his visitors.

"This swipes-swilling blighter is a friend of yern?"

"No!" answered the Major blandly, "not at all. No more a friend of mine than he is of yours, apparently."

"Then what yer lookin' for him for?"

"Well, now," replied the Major pleasantly, "you do not always look for a man that you may pour blessings upon his head!"

"By —— nope! That's true! Blessings! If that cub were to show his nose in this cabin, I'd break his neck like a rabbit's."

"And I," said the Major encouragingly, "should applaud the deed."

"Yer would, would yer?"

As he asked the question Ginger Bob's baleful eyes shot a cunning, shrewdish look at the Major. Then he laughed harshly. "So that's the game, Colonel?"

Andover laughed back, and in his laugh there was a vicious note. "I would pay a thousand dollars to the man who could take me to Musgrave to-night!"

"Can't be done in a night!" said the whisky-runner quickly. "This is a country of big spaces an' no railroads. But I guess I'll earn that thousand dollars."

"You will?" asked the Major excitedly. "Then you know where Musgrave is?"

"Not exactly! But I guess I can find out. I know where the man who was pardner with him hangs out. Guess he knows where that cub camps, though I reckon he wouldn't tell me."

"But you will take us to him?"

"Yep. An' by Christopher I'll help yer tew put the job through, Colonel."

There was a brutal frankness in the whisky-runner's manner as well as in his words. It was plain that he felt there was no necessity to hide his own malevolence towards Neil Musgrave; and it was equally plain that he divined the purpose for which his visitors sought the man whom he counted as his enemy. He thrust out a hand, grinning ferociously, as he spoke, and the Major took the hand without a qualm.

"Then it is a bargain?"

"Yep, Colonel, a bargain. I've a score to wipe off, same as yer 'pear ter have; an' I guess I'll leave Jim here to do ther trade whiles I go a-cleanin' things up. We'll start in ther morning for Cedar Forks ter find Pat McGuire."

"Who is Pat McGuire?"

"This one's pardner that was. He've struck it rich lately, and is spreading hisself like one of them Klondyke Kings. I guess he wants his comb cropping too."

"That is nothing to me," said the Major quickly. "You can do what you like with the Irishman. It is Musgrave I want—and soon."

"At the first glimpse of day to-morrer we start, yer can bet yer life on that, Colonel."

And so it came about five days later that Pat McGuire, looking from the door of a friend's cabin at Cedar Forks, saw a dog-train with three men pass up that city's only street. He glanced at them with idle curiosity; recognised Ginger Bob and thereat shrugged his shoulders expressively. The bully's two companions interested him. What he knew of the man they were with did not dispose him to regard them in any favourable light, and he took good note of them, so that an hour later when Andover, accompanied by Endicott, accosted him at the bar of the Mikado, he instantly recognised them.

"Mr. Pat McGuire—I believe?" said the Major affably.

"Shure, ye belave right for once!" answered the Irishman, looking at the speaker with frank curiosity.

"You know a friend of mine for whom I am looking—or so I am told."

"Now who will that be?" asked McGuire curiously.

"Mr. Neil Musgrave."

McGuire gave no sign of his recognition of the name. He was conscious that the two men were watching him closely, and as he lolled there with his elbow on the bar, his brain was busy wondering what these two men, whom Ginger Bob had brought to Cedar Forks, wanted with his late partner. There was something about the younger of the two men that was vaguely familiar. He felt that he had seen him somewhere before, but where his memory refused to indicate, and after a moment he made reply:

"Now who would be afther tellin' ye that I knew a gintleman av that name?"

At this quite unexpected question the Major was a little nonplussed; and unaware that McGuire

had witnessed their advent at Cedar Forks, made his first mistake.

"Oh," he answered carelessly, "we have heard from several people that your were Musgrave's partner."

"Ye have?" There was a look of affected surprise in the Irishman's face. Then with a snap in his tones he asked, "Maybe ye didn't get the information from that scallywag ye came into this city with; I mane Ginger Bob?"

"That gentleman confirmed what we had already heard," lied the Major glibly, "and he brought us here that we might talk with you."

"He did, I know he did," answered McGuire, "an' now ye've talked wid me ye can just let him take ye back again, for Mr. Musgrave ain't here."

Then Major Andover made his second mistake. Standing there, talking with the rough-speaking and carelessly dressed Irishman, he quite forgot what Ginger Bob had told him about McGuire having made a strike.

"I would give a hundred dollars for news of Mr. Musgrave's whereabouts."

He was astonished at the Irishman's reception of his remark. McGuire stood upright from the bar counter and broke into sudden laughter.

"Ye would? Ye would?"

"Yes!" answered the Major, a little nettled by the other's attitude.

"An' I, sorr, would give a thousand for that same news! So when ye hear——"

The Major turned abruptly away. He knew that the information that he sought was not to be obtained from McGuire, and was quite convinced that the Irishman really did not know Neil Musgrave's whereabouts. Accompanied by Endicott he left the saloon, and outside found Ginger Bob waiting.

"Well?" asked the bully.

"McGuire does not know where——"

"Oh, that's all my eye," began the other.

"No," interrupted the Major, "it's not all your eye. It's the truth. A child could see through McGuire if he were lying."

For a moment Ginger Bob was nonplussed, and a black look came on his face. Then he recovered himself.

"There's no need to be too upset, Colonel. The resources of civil-i-sation, as the papers say, ain't yet exhausted. Somebody must know where Musgrave is, an' we've got to find that same. Just make yerself comfortable whilst I nose around this here city. If I don't pick up the trail somehow then I'm a Dutchman, an' I ain't that by any manner o' means."

And with a nod that he meant to be reassuring Ginger Bob passed into the Mikado saloon, leaving Andover and his companion staring thoughtfully at each other.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAIL OF JUSTICE

BETWEEN the long lines of sombre pine trees that lined the banks of the frozen river, in a world white as a funeral shroud, and silent as the grave save for the panting of his dogs, the crunch of snow-shoes and the creaking of the sled, Neil Musgrave made his solitary way. It was now late afternoon, and he had travelled since morning without sign of any living thing, except a fox-trail in the snow and the far-away howl of some predatory wolf. As he travelled from time to time he examined the right bank of the river, and once he stopped

to consult a roughly drawn map, and then resumed his way.

He was on the trail of Ginger Bob, though the trail was an oblique one. Five days before an Indian in a comatose condition had been picked up ten miles from the police-post. At first the corporal who had found him had thought the Indian was overcome with the cold, but the vile odour of rye whisky had soon convinced him that the man was only drunk, and he had been conveyed to the post, where strong measures had been adopted to restore him, and after a sleep, he had wakened to ask where he was, and the whereabouts of his dog-team.

Information as to the latter could not be furnished, but his whereabouts was quickly explained to him, and then in turn he was pressed for information as to how he had come by the whisky which had almost cost him his life. He had shown no reluctance to giving the information desired. He had got it at the winter camp of Chief Big Moose on the Little River. Asked how Big Moose had come by the whisky he could not say. All he knew was that journeying southward he had made the camp of Big Moose, who was the son of his mother's sister, and that a potlach (feast) had been in progress. There had been whisky, tins of it, and the Indian's eyes glowed reminiscently as he recalled this unusual plenty. And for it he understood Big Moose had paid all the pelts he had in store as well as a moose-hide bag of the yellow stones which crazed white men sought on all the rivers and creeks. The potlach had been a big one, and he himself had stayed two days, and then stealing one of the few remaining tins of whisky he had made his departure. At each camp that he had made he had consumed some of the whisky ; but it was not all drunk, oh

no, there was quite a third of the tin left. It was wrapped in the blanket on his sled, and he would be glad to know where his dogs were, for that whisky was very good.

Corporal Tredholt had laughed at the native's one anxiety. "I guess you won't see that whisky any more. No doubt your dogs have bolted home, and by this time your squaw is celebrating her widowhood in strong waters."

No more remaining to learn from the man, Tredholt had consulted with Neil Musgrave.

"This is your particular show, Musgrave. I can't go, and you'll have to tackle the job yourself. But I don't suppose for one moment that you'll hit against the real culprit, whether it's Ginger Bob or not. After a deal, this kind of cattle usually makes itself scarce, and by this time the fellow will be hoofing it with the spoil. But if you see Big Moose and threaten him with the terrors of the law you may be able to find out something, and if you can learn where the whisky-runner camps, the job will be fairly simple. But I don't suppose for one moment you will. These fellows, for divers reasons, keep their comings and goings secret; and it isn't in the least likely that Big Moose knows about the runner's location. Yet you may have the luck to discover something useful. The sooner you start the better."

Neil Musgrave had started within an hour of this conversation, and now after five days of incessant travelling he knew that he was in the neighbourhood of the confluence of the Little River with the main stream that he followed.

A turn of the river round a great rampart of rock brought into sight the place he was making for. A mile away a long tongue of land projected itself into the frozen surface of the river, a tongue

unusually bleak and sombre, for though the snow lay everywhere, fire at no very distant date had swept the timber which grew upon it, and now the dead trunks showed ragged and gaunt poles against the universal whiteness. In twenty minutes he had reached the place, where the trail forked, and taking the way to the right soon had evidence that he was not far from human habitations. His dogs, without any urging, quickened their pace, and occasionally lifted their snouts to sniff the air, and then giving utterance to short whines, buckled anew to the traces. Musgrave as yet was unconscious of anything in the air to account for this revival of energy in the tired dogs, but presently it smote his nostrils—a faint aromatic odour of burning spruce diffused on the cold, still air, and reaching him whilst yet a mile and a half away from the centre of diffusion.

The mounting excitement of his team communicated itself to him. He cracked his whip, and urging the dogs onward and clinging to the gee-pole swung forward at a great pace. Then through the gathering dusk, he caught sight of the encampment that he sought, eight moose-hide tepees against the sombre background of the primeval woods.

"Good!" he cried aloud, whilst his dogs yelped in excitement, and followed the trail as it turned inward to the bank.

Four minutes later his team had come to a standstill, and a moment after, with the butt end of his whip, he was beating back a score of savage huskies, which, appearing suddenly from the shadow of the tepees, flung themselves on his own dogs. His blows were not gentle and he did not spare them. Hip-high in the snarling tangle he struck at the aggressors, beating them back, then out of the tepees poured the population of the camp, and the owners of the huskies called them off. The

situation was quite new to him, but he behaved as if it were an everyday affair, unharnessed and fed his dogs with the air of a man very much at home, then throwing open his fur parka, and so revealing the uniform beneath, he turned to an old Indian who stood a little apart from the rest and whom he guessed to be Big Moose.

"How!" said the Indian, an uneasy look coming in his eyes as they fell upon the uniform.

"You're Big Moose, I suppose?" said Musgrave in a voice that was unconsciously peremptory.

"Yes, I Chief Big Moose," said the Indian in guttural English.

"Then I want to talk with you. Which is your tepee?"

Without a word Big Moose turned to lead the way towards one of the moose-hide tents that stood a little apart from the rest. As he did so a woman darted forward and disappeared in the tepee. Musgrave saw her, and guessing that there was some good reason for such haste, quickened his own pace, and stepping in front of Big Moose, entered the tent in time to see the woman throwing a caribou skin over something against the skin wall. She looked on dumbly, as did the chief, whilst he tossed the skin aside. Underneath were three kerosene tins—two of them empty, the third with part of its contents still remaining. He lifted it, drew out the stopper, and put his nose to it.

"So," he said, turning to the watching Indian. "Where did you get this, Big Moose?"

A sullen look came on the Indian's face, and over his shoulder Musgrave saw three or four other faces crowding in at the tent door. The chief did not reply; and the white man continued: "There's no need to make any trouble about it, Big Moose. I knew about this when I came here, and

I want to know who traded the stuff to you?"

"Me not know man's name," said the Indian, watching the policeman with dismayed eyes as he deliberately emptied the remaining liquor on the earthen floor.

"No? But you know where he comes from?"

The Indian shook his head. "He not tell. He come from the woods. He go back that way."

Big Moose waved his hand towards the West, and when Musgrave questioned him as to the appearance of the trader, he received a description that was not at all like Ginger Bob. He questioned the Indian closely, and at last, convinced that the chief had told him the truth, he desisted, and after giving him a lecture on the evil of bartering tribal wealth for fire-water, made his camp for the night.

Lying in his sleeping-bag in front of the fire, he thought long on the problem before him, and in the morning he made a close inspection of the various trails leading in and out of the camp, and found one that arrested his attention. It was a double trail made by a single sledge and ran to and from the great woods behind the encampment. Convinced that this was the trail of the whisky-trader he sought Big Moose, and receiving confirmation of his conviction, half an hour afterwards he started to follow the trail.

After two hours' fast travelling he found the trail veering round towards the main river and was far from surprised when in the late afternoon its frozen expanse opened out before him. He descended the steep bank, and noted that the trail of the sled that he was following turned northward. Assured of that, he himself turned north, and after travelling three miles came to a long stretch of ice that the wind had swept clear of snow. Without a single misgiving he raced the full length of it: sure that he

would pick up the trail again on the further side of it. But he did not do so. Turning his dogs about, he crossed the river from bank to bank and found an unbroken surface of snow. The conclusion he drew from this was the obvious one—somewhere in that stretch of clear ice the man whom he was following had turned from the river trail.

It was now almost dark and he decided to camp. Finding a suitable place, he built a fire, fed his dogs, and ate his evening meal. Then as he was in front of the fire over a pipe, a restlessness fell on him. He did not know it, but it was the desire of the hunter that made it impossible to sit there inactive, and tired though he was he rose to his feet, and began to walk down the river. In the northern sky the aurora flashed its streamers of light, and as the snow of the banks caught the reflection it was comparatively easy to find any place where the crusted surface had been broken. He walked the full length of the clear ice without making the discovery he hoped to make, and then driven by the restlessness that was on him, he crossed to the other bank.

As he did so, half a mile or so to the north of his camp a man crossed the river in the opposite direction, his eyes turned always towards the fire on the bank. When he reached the further side this man entered the forest, and under the shadow of the trees worked his way in a half-circle towards Musgrave's camp. When he reached the immediate neighbourhood of it, he halted and waited, marking time in the snow to keep his feet from freezing. The dogs were sound asleep in the holes which they had dug in the snow; and though the fire blazed, cutting out a circle of ruddy light from the night, it yet served to accentuate the shadow of the woods, and in the thicket where he waited, the furtive watcher felt secure from observation.

Presently Musgrave appeared on the ice, making a bee-line for his camp. As he stepped into the circle of the firelight, there was a look of satisfaction on his face which told the watcher that he had found what he sought. The policeman seated himself by the fire and the watcher examined him carefully.

"A Mounter!"

The words shaped themselves upon his lips, soundlessly, then a look of interest quickened in his eyes. He leaned forward to get a better look at Musgrave's face, and at that moment the man whom he watched kicked the glowing logs with his foot. Flames shot up, and in the light of them the watcher saw the trooper's face quite clearly. A look of surprise came on his own face, and he pursed his lips as if to whistle, but did not do so. He stood for a moment considering, and then swiftly drew the mitten from his hand, and silently unbuttoned the pistol holster at his waist. Then he stood irresolute. His eyes wandered from the trooper by the fire to the darkness beyond. A thoughtful look came into his eyes and he nodded. Then he buttoned the holster afresh, and hurriedly drew on his mitten, for the intense cold was already numbing the bare flesh. The policeman leaned forward and threw a couple of fresh sticks on the fire, and as the latter cracked and roared, the watcher withdrew from the thicket and silently faded back into the forest, leaving the trooper unaware how close death had stood to him in the darkness.

But in the morning, observing one of his dogs nosing in the thicket, Neil Musgrave, thinking that it might be on the trail of a rabbit that would serve him for a meal, walked to the place to look, and so made the discovery of the footmarks the

watcher had left in the snow. He saw that they were quite fresh, and from the packed condition of a yard or so of snow, easily conjectured that whoever had made those footprints had stood in that place some little time, moving his feet to keep the frost away. Standing on the packed snow, he looked back to his camp. Whoever had stood in that place in the night had been able to observe him as clearly as if he had been sitting on the other side of the camp-fire. A puzzled look came on his face. Who could have stood there to watch him and then withdrawn without revealing himself? An Indian, possibly a——

Sudden excitement fell on him. Eagerly he began to follow the double line of footsteps through the wood; and presently found himself upon the river bank again to the north of his own camp. The trail continued across the river and he followed it to the woods on the opposite side, and through the trees almost parallel with the bank, to a small creek where was a sled-trail that he had discovered in his search the previous night.

When he arrived at that point he turned, and with all speed made his way to his own camp. Some one had noticed his fire and had gone to very considerable trouble to observe him, whilst avoiding observation himself. The conjunction of the foot-marks with the sled-trail led him to the only possible conclusion. The man whom he was following was aware that some one was on his track and had stalked him to learn who he was, and it would now be a race between them.

He broke camp swiftly, and harnessing his dogs made straight across the river. Less than three hundred yards up the creek, he found the place where the man had camped; a dried arm of the creek which made a sheltered hollow, and where a

small round fire, after the Indian habit, had been made. Examining this place carefully, he saw that the fire must have been invisible from his own camp, whilst any one moving from the hollow to the main creek must inevitably have seen the glow of his own larger fire. In the snow he found two or three coffee beans which the camper had dropped, and the sight of them removed the first impression which had come to him at the sight of the dead fire. No Indian had built it. It was a white man's fire though made in Indian style, and without further waste of time he pushed forward on a hot scent.

He travelled till noon, following the sled-trail made by his quarry through a maze of frozen waterways until he reached a small river up which the trail followed steadily. Keeping a sharp look-out, he urged the dogs forward. After a little over half an hour, he unexpectedly descried a cabin nestling in the shadow of the pines on the right bank. Instantly he turned his dogs inshore, and in the shelter of the trees considered his further course.

The cabin might be the location of the whisky-runner whom he was following, or it might be the winter home of some trapper or prospector quite innocent of offence against the laws of the Territory. The one was just as possible as the other, and in the latter case he had, of course, nothing to fear; but it seemed most probable that this was indeed the home of the man he sought, and it was advisable to guard against dangerous contingencies. Accordingly he led the dogs a little way into the wood, and anchoring them by the simple expedient of turning the sled over on its side, began to make his way towards the cabin. He moved with extreme caution, pausing at times to listen and in the course of half an hour found himself within twenty yards of the cabin. Standing behind a tree, he stopped to reconnoitre.

All was still about the cabin. No smoke came from the rough stone chimney, and there was no scent of burning wood in the air. He examined the place carefully for any sign of life—but found none either of dogs or men, and at last, convinced that the place was deserted, he stepped into the open and walked straight towards the cabin door. When he reached it, he hammered on it with his whip-stock. There as no response to his summons, and a moment later he pulled the hide thong which served for latch-string, and stepped inside.

The first thing that struck him was that the place was warm, and he turned instinctively to the stove. The fire was out, but investigation revealed the fact that the ashes were not yet cold. It appeared that the cabin had been recently occupied, and further investigation set the matter beyond dispute. There were the remains of a meal upon the packing case that served for table, a piece of plug tobacco obviously freshly cut, and a tin mug to which still clung the odour of whisky. In a bunk in the corner of the cabin were a couple of heavy blankets, crumpled, as if the man they had covered had tossed them from him, and had afterwards sat upon them, but nowhere except in the odour of the tin mug did he find any trace of the forbidden spirits.

He went outside and, walking all round the cabin, discovered a well-trodden trail leading to the woods. Following it, he presently reached a huge windfall, where a score of great trees, blown to earth by some fierce gale of the north, formed a most amazing tangle, the trunks criss-crossing and the branches interlacing in a wildly freakish fashion. He looked at the windfall in perplexity for a moment, then he examined it carefully. A smile came on his face, as he caught sight of a large feathery branch, broken from its parent trunk, which, as he was convinced,

could by no conceivable accident have lodged just where it was. Apparently it formed part of the tangle, and any one glancing at it casually would not have looked at it twice. But he was convinced that it was placed just where it was by design, and turning away, he went back to his team, righted the sled, and took from it an axe. Taking the dogs forward, he went back to the windfall, and set to work. Within five minutes he had cut his way into an artfully constructed dug-out, and striking a match saw about twenty tins stacked together. He lifted one of them as the match went out. It was full, as he guessed were the others and he did not trouble to ascertain the contents of them. Of that he had no question whatever.

Making his way out again, he returned to the cabin to consider his further course of action. He had found the whisky-runner's location, but the man had gone, and it was the man he wanted, whether he was Ginger Bob or another. The man knew that he was being pursued. He had fled from the scene of his operations, and having probably travelled through the night would now be miles away. The question for him was whether he should take up the pursuit, or make a camp in the district and keep an eye of the cabin in the hope of the whisky-runner retrrning to it? Instantly he decided on the former course, for the ardour of the chase was on him, and a running quarry is always more attractive than one which merely steps into a trap. The man would be well ahead by this time, but as he argued, he would have to camp before long; and it was possible that by pushing on he might overtake him. He would give the dogs and himself two hours' rest, make a hot meal, and then follow the trail as fast as he could.

Accordingly he lit a fire, and whilst it was burning

up, went outside, fed his dogs, and then began to cast about for the fugitive's trail. There were many tracks about the cabin, and more than one on the river, but the most recent of all led up-stream almost due north. He knew that was the trail of the running man. And two hours later, refreshed by the food and rest, he once more set his face to the frozen wilderness, hope singing in his heart.

CHAPTER X

BETTY MEETS A FRIEND

MISS BETTY MARLOWE was not quite her old self, or so her friends said. They attributed the change in her to the shock of the accident through which she had passed, and the further shock of her aunt's tragic death. And they were all wrong. Betty's youth was proof against both these shocks, and though she naturally was grieved by the loss of her only near relative, a few weeks sufficed to place that event in its proper category of inevitable things that repining could not alter. But the change in her was certainly marked; and though she confessed it to no one, it was attributable to Neil Musgrave's silence.

Since he had left her on the station at Waterloo she had heard no word of him. Her letter had gone unanswered, and the fears she had expressed therein mounted daily. Major Andover and Maurice Endicott had departed from her ken—westward on their hunting trip; and her fears as to their real quarry disquieted her beyond words. That disquiet had not been lessened by an incident which had occurred on her arrival at the station of Ottawa, after the accident. Mr. Bouchard, her aunt's lawyer and one of her own trustees, had been

on the station to meet her, and, as she had descended from the train in the company of Maurice Endicott and the Major, had met the latter face to face. That they knew each other had been made plain by Major Andover's greeting.

"Hallo Bouchard!"

The lawyer's response or rather lack of it had been surprising to Betty—and perhaps to the Major. Into his usual kindly eyes had come a contemptuous look. He made absolutely no reply, to the Major's familiar greeting. Turning to Betty, he had said almost sharply, "Come away, my dear," and in the drive homeward had questioned her closely as to her association with Andover. He had been undisguisedly relieved to find how little she had had to do with him, and still more relieved on learning the explanation of the presence of the Major and his companion in Canada; but he had warned her against him in unmeasured terms.

"Have nothing to do with him, Betty! If you should meet him in the street, cut him; if you meet him elsewhere, avoid him. He is an unmitigated rascal."

Recalling her aunt's attitude to Major Andover, fresh curiosity had surged within her and she had pressed Mr. Bouchard for further explanation. The kindly old lawyer, however, had shaken his head.

"No, my dear child," he had replied, "I shall tell you nothing. It is better that you should remain in ignorance. You may hear the explanation some day—but I pray God you never will."

There the matter had rested; but as she dwelt on the silence of Neil Musgrave and on the words which she had heard as she passed out of the swoon, and considered the lawyer's estimate of the Major's character, her vague fears for her lover's safety mounted, till she felt that she could remain inactive

no longer, and one snowy day she went down to Mr. Bouchard's house with a letter.

"I am going to Edmonton on a visit," she said. "Stella Ferguson has written to me, pressing me to go and see her, and as I feel the need of a change I have accepted."

Mr. Bouchard looked out of the window and smiled. "Edmonton—in this weather! But I think you are right, Betty. You need a change, and Stella Ferguson has tonic qualities. A month with her should be better than gallons of medicine."

"I shall be away longer than a month, I expect," replied Betty. "I may stay the winter."

"You will please yourself, of course, my dear. You are your own mistress; but you won't forget an old buffer like me. You will let me hear from you sometimes."

"Of course," replied Betty, smiling, "and if you like you can come and see me off to-morrow."

"I shall like very much," answered Mr. Bouchard.

So on the following day he saw her into the westward-bound express, received a quite ardent kiss for his trouble, and went home pleased with the thought that the girl's spirit was returning, and utterly ignorant of Betty's real object in accepting the invitation to Edmonton. For the lure of Edmonton was that it lay in the west, and, being convinced that Neil Musgrave had gone westward, she hoped that there she might hear news of him.

But that thriving place knew nothing of her lover. When, exercising all discretion, she mentioned his name, it elicited no recognition, and she had been there a month, with hopelessness deepening from day to day, when an encounter in the street brought her a sudden uplift.

She had driven alone into the town to purchase some little thing of which she stood in need, and

was just stepping into the sleigh again, when the attitude of a man on the sidepath arrested her attention. He was a big, bearded man, with eyes made for merriment, and though he was carelessly dressed, his furs were of a quality that would have moved many a pretty woman to envy. Just now the brown eyes were staring at her as if she had been a vision, and there was an expression of extreme amazement on his open face. Suddenly he spoke.

"Mother av Hivven ! 'Tis Neil's li'l gir-rl !"

At the words Betty's face became first red and then pale almost as the snow. She stood there silent, staring at the speaker as though stricken with dumbness ; and conscious that his words might be misunderstood and taken for rudeness, the man spoke again.

"Ye'll pardon a plain man, misthress, but——"

Then Betty found her tongue. "I do not know who you are——"

"Me ! Strewth, I'm McGuire—Pat McGuire, very much at your sarvice."

"You know Neil Musgrave ?"

"Know him, is ut ? Shure the bhoy's me parthner."

"Then you know where he is ?" asked Betty, her eyes lighting with sudden hope.

The Irishman shook his head lugubriously. "That I do not. I was hopin' ye'd be able to tell me, missy."

"But if he is your partner——"

"Shure he's that still ; though bedad ! the bhoy doesn't know ut ; an' he's part owner av two of the richest claims in the North. But I haven't put eyes on him these five long months."

Betty's horse began to stamp in the snow, and betrayed other signs of restlessness. She looked quickly round at it, and then back to the Irishman.

"Oh, I must talk with you," she said. "Where can we go?"

"Well, if ye was to put your baste up somewheres, thar's one o' thim caf-ee places just across the strathe thar—they'd let us talk if we ate enough buns, I guess."

"Wait for me," said Betty. "I will return in five minutes."

"No hurry—no hurry whativer," answered McGuire. "I'd wait for yer a wake, to talk about the bhoys."

Betty stepped into the sleigh and drove down the street to an hotel, where she put up the horse. Seven minutes later she returned to find McGuire standing at the café door, beckoning to her. She entered with him, to learn that he had secured a table at the far end of the long pine-boarded room near the stove. There was quite a stack of buns on the table and as they seated themselves a waitress hurried to them with a coffee pot.

"Hilp yourself, Miss—Miss—I misremember your name."

"Marlowe—Betty Marlowe is my name."

"Shure, I recollect now! That was ut! Thin ye haven't mated wid the man whose pictcher was in the paper alongside av yours?"

Betty was a little startled. She had been shown the paper wherein a too-enterprising journalist had jumped to an unwarranted conclusion, and which had occasioned her some indignation, but never once had she thought of Neil Musgrave seeing it. Her face flushed painfully.

"You saw that, you and Neil?"

"Shure! 'twas by that I recognised ye jist now. An' by the same token——" McGuire broke off abruptly, and watching him, Betty saw a sudden light of recollection leap into his eyes. "Be jabbers, now, that's a quare thing!"

"What is?" she asked quickly.

"Why that guy whose pictcher was alongside the one av ye is up North lookin' for Neil!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I've seen him. I thought I knew him at the time, but couldn't rimimber. Now ut all comes back. He was the man av the pictcher; an' he was lookin' for Neil, he an' another, companying with a man fwat hates Neil like poison by rason av a sound drubbin' the bhoy gave him."

"Oh, tell me! Tell me everything," said Betty urgently. "Start at the very beginning and tell me every little thing. Miss nothing out! It may be important!"

"So I will, Miss Marlowe. But shtart av thim buns. We've got to ate for the good av the house here, ye know. Ate away, and I'll talk."

He waited till she took one of the buns, and then started his narrative, beginning at the time of his meeting with Musgrave and ending with their parting at Dawson. Several times Betty interrupted to ask a question. The first time was when he spoke of the moments of temptation through which Musgrave had passed on the first night of their acquaintance.

"You say it was a silver box that he was looking at, Mr. McGuire?"

"Wid ribbons on ut, Miss Betty. I didn't know what was in ut then, but I saw it agin later, an'thin the bhoy tould me fwat ut was."

"When was that?" asked Betty quickly.

"'Twas on the night whin he saw your pictcher in the paper alongside av that man fwat is lookin' for him."

"Ah!"

"The bhoy was sorely timplted thin, I know, for I watched him. He was a little knocked by that

rumour which the ink-slinger had put in the paper about ye, ye onderstand, an' I guess the thing drew him as whisky draws another man whin he's in trouble. Anyway he started to open the box, for I saw him wid knife in his hand——"

"But he didn't open it? He didn't?"

"No! Kape your mind aisy about that, Miss Betty. But he had to fight the divil that was in it. Once he was on his knees wid the thing on the ground, for all the world as if 'twas a hathen god that he was prayin' to; an' I heard him whisper, 'Why not? Who cares if I——' Thin I suppose terror av the thing got hold av him, an' picking it up, he threw the thing into the bushes."

"Thank God!" whispered the girl.

"But he didn't let ut stop there. Nothin' would plase him but that he must find ut again, though he owned to me that he was mortal feared av that which the box hild. But he's the righ stuff, is the bhoy. He would win or die, fightin', which is the proper spirit for a man, though whether 'tis wisdom or not the Lord alone knows. It wasn't my way. If the box had had whisky in it, I'd have drunk, ye understand, Miss Betty; I'd have been compelled therto, or else the thing would have gone into the river; but, thank the Lord, all men ain't made alike. Howsomiver, the bhoy found the box again, an' tould me he mint to see the thing through. But 'twas that same night that he made up his mind to lave me, for the very nixt morning he tould me that we was to dissolve partnership whin we touched civilisation agin. I thried 'ard to git him to tell me fwhat was in the mind av him; but nothin' could I git out av him except that he was going to some place where he'd have discipline—sanctuary, he called ut!"

"Sanctuary?"

"That was the word. From somethin' he said to me I thought 'twas in his mind to go to a praste-house——"

"A priest-house!" cried Betty, startled. "Do you mean a monastery?"

"Yes! But the bhoy said it wasn't that. But I've done a goodish bit av thinkin' since he went away, an' I've me own idea about that!"

"What is it?" asked Betty; and there was a shadow of apprehension in her eyes. Neil was something of a dreamer. If he had indeed entered a monastery, taken vows——

"The bhoy said he was not lavin' the North. Well, up on the McQuestin River, there's a French praste—Father Molineau, who has fwat he calls a Refuge. There's about twinty men up thar, who do fwat the praste tills thim, work on the farm in summer an' in the woods in winter—trappin', huntin' an' such like. The Brothers av Sarvice, he calls thim—though there's some immortal ruffians amongst thim. 'Tis in me mind that the bhoy may have heard av this place, an' have gone up thar for the discipline he wanted. Do ye understand?"

"Yes!" said Betty, a little relieved.

"Well, I'm goin' up thar whin I lave this city. Neil's me pardner yet, though he doesn't know ut; an' between us we're as rich as Crasus—whoiver he may be, for two av the places we struck have turned up trumps, an' I want him to hilp to run thim. So thar ye are, Miss Betty, an' that's about all thar is to tell ye."

Betty sat without speaking for a moment, then she said, "Suppose you find Neil with Father Molineau—and he refuses to come away with you?"

"Thin I shall tell him about ye," answered McGuire promptly.

Again the girl fell thoughtful, and the Irishman watched her, wondering what was in her mind. When at last she spoke, her words startled him.

"Suppose I were to go with you, Mr. McGuire; wouldn't that——"

"Mother av Hivven!" interrupted the Irishman. "Ye don't know what it manes, girl. 'Tis no light thing to make Father Molineau's place in summer; and in winter 'tis a thousand times worse. In summer 'tis canoes; but in winter it's dog-trains an' snow-shoes, a divil av a journey, all the way!"

"Nevertheless I should like to go!" said Betty decisively.

McGuire tugged at his beard, and considered her thoughtfully. She was young and strong, and, as he knew, she would be a trump card to play if Neil was indeed at the Mission of Our Lady. He had full confidence in himself as a trail-leader; and besides the thing could be done in style and in comparative comfort, for as he expressed it to himself he had loads of dust, and he could buy the services of the best trail-breakers in the North.

"Well," he said at last, "if ye're set on ut, Miss Betty, ut could be done—but about your father an' mother——"

"I am an orphan, and my own mistress. There is no need to worry about any one else."

Again McGuire considered. "Well, if ye really mane it, girl——"

"I do!"

"Thin 'tis settled," said the Irishman. "I'll make the nicissary arrangements, an' see ye again. We'll have the bhoy out av Molineau's hands in double quick time." He broke off, and then smiled hugely. "Thim buns, Miss Betty? Ye've 'aten none, an' I've no taste for such fancy truck. For the good av the house——"

Betty broke into laughter, inexpressibly relieved at the Irishman's consent to her suggestion.

"I can't possibly eat them," she said merrily. "Besides, there is no need. One just makes a selection——"

"Thin I must pay for thim, for I tould the young leddy thar that ye was hungry as a timber-wolf, an' she'll put me down as a howling fraud, if I don't."

And pay for them he did, explanations and protestations from the management notwithstanding, and that little incident, ludicrous in some of its aspects, to Betty's eyes revealed Pat McGuire for what he was—a simple man, transparently honest.

And so it came about that a week later Betty started for the Wild Northland, with Pat McGuire for guide and friend, and with them travelled a half-breed driver who was anxious to reach his home at the Hudson Bay post at Athabasca Landing. There McGuire spent a whole week, organising his expedition with a view to the girl's comfort, Betty spending the time as the guest of the Agent's wife; and one clear morning when the snow was crisp with frost, and it was a joy to be alive, three spanking dog-teams, with a couple of Indian drivers as assistants to McGuire, pulled out from the Landing, and the real journey into the North began.

To Betty, notwithstanding the toil of the trail, the journey was an unmitigated delight. The frozen waterways, the huge ramparts of snow-covered rocks and hills, the sombre shadows of the primeval woods, wherein life roamed as wild and primitive as in the days when the Company of Adventurers made its first entrance on the fur preserves of the Arctic, filled her with wonder, and the novelty of the journey never staled. The great white silence of the North thrilled her to awe, the flashing of the aurora

increased her wonder, and the howl of wolves on the blood trail or the coughing bellow of the moose, were revelations of the terrors that were hidden in this land of snow and deep shadows and awesome silence.

One day was much the same as another. The breaking of camp before daylight, the toil of the trail, the camp at night with McGuire to tell her wild stories of the wilderness and the early days of the Klondyke gold rush, before she retired to her little tent for the night, to sleep more soundly than she had ever slept in her life before.

Hope sang in her heart, and with the labour the trail demanded a new spring and resiliency came to her frame. A month's snow-shoe work made her so expert that she might have been born to the trail. McGuire tried to spare her, suggesting rides upon one of the sleds, but she would have none of it, but marched with the men, youth and health glowing in her veins. Her face took on a new beauty, perhaps because of the love-light in her eyes, and once McGuire was moved to express his admiration and sense of change in her.

"Bedad, Miss Betty, the bhoy won't know ye whin we come up wid him; but he'll fall clane overhead in love wid ye all the same."

Betty flushed rosily at this praise, and laughingly asked, "You think so, Pat?"

"Think! Great Christopher, no! I'm dead shure. Father Molineau an' his acolytes won't have the ghost av a chance against ye."

Neither of them entertained the slightest doubt that they would find Neil Musgrave at the solitary station in the North whither they were journeying. McGuire's thought of that place as the sanctuary Neil had sought had become a settled conviction with each of them, and the disappointment they

experienced was proportionate to the depth of the conviction, when in the midst of a snowstorm they made the forlorn group of log cabins, with the wooden chapel which constituted Father Molineau's Mission of Our Lady.

The priest—a tall thin man, a Jesuit, with the light of the fanatic in his dark eyes—received them with the hospitality that the North extends to all wanderers. He was a priest and a man of the world, a scholar and a gentleman born in some old chateau on the Loire, with manners whose polish could not be exceeded in the court of Kings.

"You are weary," he said when McGuire began his story. "I know what it means to travel through the storm. Wait until you have eaten, then you shall tell me what you will."

His table was a revelation to Betty—who had seen nothing like it in the North. The food itself was mostly that which the Northland provided, but the napery was of the finest, there was glass and silver that would have done no discredit to a ducal mansion, and a bottle of wine that had travelled a full three thousand miles. There were nuts and preserved fruits for dessert, and when these were reached Father Molineau turned to Betty with a smile.

"I see the impatience beginning, so now if you or your friend will tell me what you want of me, I shall be happy to serve you."

Betty turned quickly to McGuire, conscious that her heart was beating wildly and that her voice would tremble if she asked the question of the answer to which she felt so sure. The Irishman drove straight to the point.

"Father Molineau," he said, "we are lookin' for a man, who is a friend av mine, an' more than a friend av Miss Marlowe's. He was a man fightin'

temptation, an' needing sanctuary an' discipline, or so he thought. He wint away back in the summer an' we believe he may have come to you.'

"His name?" asked the priest quietly.

"Neil Musgrave," said the Irishman promptly.

Then Father Molineau shook his head, and spoke in tones that showed his regret at the destruction of their hope.

"There is no man of that name with me."

He turned from Betty as he spoke. He knew that tears of disappointment were brimming in her eyes, and he looked only at McGuire, whose honest rugged face wore an expression of dismay.

"Tell me," he said, "what was your friend like? Names are nothing—mere labels that may be changed at will. And if a man wished to hide from even his friends, why——"

He broke off with an expressive gesture, and listened carefully to McGuire's description. Then once more he shook his head.

"No," he said simply, "your friend was not with me. I am very sorry."

Now he looked at Betty. The tears he had foreseen were glistening in her eyes, and her beautiful face was very pale. The disappointment was an exceedingly bitter one; but on the whole she bore it better than McGuire, who blamed himself for having inspired an unwarranted hope.

"Fwhat will ye be thinkin' av me, Miss Betty?" he cried. "I've brought ye all this long way on a wild-goose chase. I——"

"You are not altogether to blame, Pat! When I heard of Father Molineau's Mission, I was sure that Neil would have come here."

"Perhaps he had never heard of my band of brothers," said the priest gently. "But tell me, what was the temptation that he fought; and why

it should have been in your minds that you would find him here ? ”

Pat looked at Betty, who nodded, for she had no scruple in revealing Neil's secret to this kindly priest ; and Pat told what was asked. The priest said nothing until he had finished, then he asked : “ You say your friend said that what he needed was restraint, discipline, responsibility ? ”

“ Thim was his very words ! ”

“ He was right, of course,” said Father Molineau. “ Any priest would agree with that. But the question is where these are to be found ? He was remaining in the North ? ”

“ So he said ! I axed him that definitely.”

A thoughtful look came on the priest's face ; and through the silence that fell there came the sound of hard snow driving against the wooden walls of the house. Then came another sound, the jingle of bells on a dog-team outside. At that the priest looked up.

“ I had forgotten,” he said simply. “ I was expecting a friend to dine with me to-night, but your coming drove all thought of him from my head, and we have eaten the dinner. He has come twenty miles—a sergeant in the Mounted——” He broke off suddenly ; and a swift light of comprehension came in his ascetic face. “ Ah,” he said quietly, “ I think I know where your friend is ! ”

“ Ye do, Father ? ” cried McGuire in sudden uplift of hope.

“ Yes ! In my country men who are tempted and sorely driven, or on whom disaster has fallen, seek relief, sanctuary, hiding-place, call it what you like, in the Foreign Legion, which, not altogether unjustly has been called the monastery of action. There is no Foreign Legion up here in the White North, but there is the Mounted Police. A man seeking what——”

"The Mounted Police! Great Christopher, Father Molineau, ye're the wise man! I believe ye've hit the nail plumb on the head! The R.N.W.M.P.! To think I should nivver think of him! 'Tis the very thing the bhoys would do."

"I am sure of it!" answered the priest smilingly. "But I should never have thought of it, if I had not invited Sergeant Farley to dine with me to-night, so I am not so very wise after all. . . . But here comes the sergeant! Possibly he may know your friend, in which case your journey will not have been wasted."

"'Tis not wasted, Father. Whether Farley knows him or not, 'tis not wasted. Ye've put us on the right trail for Neil, I'm dead sure av it."

And looking at the conviction written in their two faces, Betty Marlowe also was dead sure of it, and felt hope spring in her heart anew.

CHAPTER XI

AN ENCOUNTER IN THE WILDERNESS

"WHAT are we stopping here for?"

The speaker was Major Andover, and in his tones there was a note of irritation as he addressed Ginger Bob.

"I want ter make a call. Yer see, I've a privit post-box near by; an' 'tis as well ter see if thar's any billy-dooes from Bill. Thar's no sense in jumpin' blindfold inter a trap; so Bill an' me has a mail sarvice of our own. I won't be more than ten minutes."

Ginger Bob grinned, and without further ado walked off into the woods. The Major looked at Endicott.

"We don't seem to benefit much by that fellow's aid and advice, Maurice."

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"No, we are no nearer the end of the search ; and I am tired of Ginger Bob's beastly company ; and more than tired of wandering over half the Arctic Circle. There's no sense in it. We ought to plant ourselves at some populous centre, where men are always coming and going. That's the place to get news of Musgrave ; and when we have reached this man's hut again and have had a good rest, that is what I shall propose we do. We can, of course, retain this blackguard's service if the money will run to that——"

"It has got to," broke in the Major with a short laugh. "Appleyard is footing the bill—and this fellow, notwithstanding his unspeakable manners, is an invaluable ally. He is more down on Musgrave than we are ourselves, having a motive—revenge—which will make him reckless of consequences. Given the opportunity, he will—er—pull the nuts out of the fire for us, without any need for us to dirty our hands. In case of trouble—well, he is simply our guide ; and we are innocent of any complicity in anything that he may do in order to vent his private spite. If only we could tumble on Musgrave's trail, we should be on velvet—absolutely on velvet, Maurice, my boy !"

"Yes—I understand that, but——"

"There are no buts about it. We've simply got to put up with this crude fellow a little while longer. Musgrave's somewhere in the North here, and with a little patience we shall hear of him. Then——"

The Major broke off with a significant gesture, and there really was no need for him to say more. For a moment his companion was silent, then he said slowly, "There is one thing that we have not considered, Major. When we do find Musgrave, this brute may insist that we take a hand in the

business; and then we shall be open to be black-mailed for the rest of our lives."

"I think not," said the Major with a slow smile. "Against that there is a very simple precaution. There is nothing about Ginger Bob that could make the world poorer for his leaving it. The man is mere vermin, and if he——"

"S-s-s-h! Here he comes. And by the look of him he has news. He's in a thumping hurry, at any rate."

Ginger Bob was certainly hurrying, running where the snow permitted it, taking drifts by fallen trees at a leap, and making a bee-line to the place where the two stood watching him. When he reached them he was almost breathless, but there was a light of triumph on his evil face.

"We'll git him!" he gasped. "We'll git him!"

"Who do you mean? Musgrave?" Andover's voice was like the crack of a whip, and there was a sudden gleam in his hard eyes.

"That same! I've news of ther skunk. 'Pears he've listed in ther Mounters——"

"In the Mounted Police!" cried Endicott in surprise. "How do you know?"

"Et's all here," replied Ginger Bob, displaying a roll of thin bark. "This is a letter from my pardner, Bill. He's bin doin' a little trade with a tribe over on one of ther rivers; an' suspected that he was being followed by one o' them troopers. One night he stalked the fellow to hev a look at him, an' found thet it was this chap Musgrave whom we're after. He remembered ther guy 'cause he was in ther saloon when ther skunk beat me up at Cedar Forks. Thort once of potting him, but changed his mind, an' thort he wouldn't do me out-a ther chance, but he was dead sure thet ther guy was following his trail, an' that he'll hang

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round ther neighbourhood of ther cabin ; so, Colonel, all we got ter do is ter push along 'ome as fast as we kin. It's as simple as suckin' candy ! ”

“ Yes ! ” said the Major. “ Yes ! How far are we from the cabin ? ”

“ Under a day's march. Yer see, Colonel, this is ther way of it. ”

With his whip-stock the whisky-trader drew a rough plan on the snow. “ Yer see we're just here, an' ther cabin's thar. Between this point an' that, 'tis a perfect net of streams an' little lakes, an' 'twill be good travelling. Bill's working round ter ther main river, boxin' ther compass so ter speak, but he'll circle ter ‘ 'Ome sweet 'Ome, ’ so if ther Mounter don't wait about ther cabin, but follows on Bill's trail, he'll land himself safe thar agin by the time he's wanted. See, Colonel ? ”

“ Yes, ” said Andover. “ Yes ! We'll push on, hey, Maurice ? ”

“ Push on by all means ! ” replied Endicott.

“ Then, gents, ef that's yer mind we'll camp for an hour or so, feed ourselves an' rest ther dogs, an' then travel late. That way we'll hit ther store by this time to-morrow. ”

The Major and Endicott having no objections, that was the plan they followed ; and in the afternoon of the following day they arrived in the neighbourhood of Ginger Bob's cabin, and whilst the owner went forward to reconnoitre the Major and his companion waited in a fever of impatience, and both, though neither mentioned it to the other, strained their ears for the report of the rifle which the whisky-runner had carried with him. But the brooding silence of the woods was unbroken by any sound, and at the end of an hour Ginger Bob returned.

“ Ther line is clear, gents, ” he announced “ That

Mounter's been at the cabin, but he's followed off on Bill's trail, so all we've got ter do es to sit an' wait for him ter spring ther trap."

"But how do you know——" began Endicott, and was instantly interrupted by the whisky-runner.

"How do I know! Why 'tes as plain as print. Ther are two trails in the snow, Bill's an' the Mounter's, ther one on ther top of the other. Time we got a move on or we'll freeze, an' as I set ther fire going 'twill be cosy at the cabin."

Without further delay the party moved forward, and when they arrived at the cabin, the owner of it showed his companion the double trail.

"Couldn't have happened better, gents. Bill will make his circuit, easy. He had hours of a start, an' he'll lead our bird home as nice as rain. 'Twill be a sitting shot."

The Major and his companion shared that conviction, but they counted without the possible interventions of fate. And as it happened the next afternoon brought a traveller to the cabin whose appearance disturbed the Major's plans considerably. This traveller was a Catholic Sister from one of those orphanages in the North, where women of gentle birth, having taken holy vows, spend their years in the rigours and discomforts of the Circle, teaching their little dark-eyed charges many useful things. She was accompanied by an Indian driver, a grave taciturn man, who looked at Ginger Bob—a long searching stare, and then began to unharness his dogs. Major Andover, as it happened, was out in the woods with a rifle looking for fresh meat and Endicott alone was in the cabin when the Sister entered, the whisky-trader having remained outside to talk to the Indian. On her entrance Maurice Endicott rose to his feet. He had seen the Sisters at Fort Vermilion, and the cross upon the woman's

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breast told him her vocation. As he looked at her he was struck by the grave, sad beauty of her face, and he had a vague sense of familiarity as if he had met her before somewhere. Swiftly he searched his mind, but could recall no such occasion. Then the woman spoke.

"Sir," she said, "I am looking for some one—a girl, I wonder if you can help me."

"Madame," responded Endicott, "if I can, be assured that I will. But you must tell me who——"

"She is quite young," interrupted the nun, "and if reports are to be believed, beautiful, and she is wandering through the North here, searching for a man. There are two Indians with her, and an Irishman whose name I believe is Patrick McGuire."

"Pat McGuire!"

"You know him?" asked the nun quickly. "He is a good man? One to whom a young girl can safely trust herself in this desolation?"

There was anxiety, positive apprehension in her tones, and Endicott, evil though he was, was moved to reassure her. "Yes!" he said. "Yes! I should think McGuire could be trusted in such a situation. You must understand that I know little about him, madame, but he struck me when I saw him as being what men call a decent sort. I do not think you need fear any evil for the girl who is with him."

"That," said the Sister in relieved tones, "is what Père Molineau said, but I was afraid—afraid." She paused a moment then she said, "I gather you have not met McGuire and my—and this girl?"

"No!" answered Endicott, noticing how the nun had checked herself, and wondering what words she had been about to use.

"And I thought they had come this way!" said the woman in a low voice, more to herself than to

him. "You see, sir," she added, "we lost their trail in a snowstorm and were unable to pick it up again. But I was sure that they were making in this direction, so——"

She broke off, and stood there thinking to herself, Maurice Endicott watched her, puzzling himself where he had seen her before, then suddenly he understood; and in his surprise ejaculated, "Great heavens!"

The nun looked at him quickly. "What is it?" she asked. "You have remembered something."

"Yes, yes!" he answered impetuously. "Madame, tell me the name of the girl whom you are looking for?"

"Her name," answered the woman quickly, "is Betty Marlowe."

Maurice Endicott was startled; but not so startled as he might have been if he had not already found the solution of his sense of familiarity with the sad and beautiful face before him. It was not that face that he had seen before, but one amazingly like it; and that was the face of the girl whose name the nun had spoken. For a moment he stared at the woman in wonder, then he cried, "Betty Marlowe! Betty is up here?"

"You know her?" asked the Sister quickly. "You know my little daughter?"

"Your daughter!" Endicott was almost dumfounded. He stared at the nun as if he could not believe his ears. Then a thought came to him that seemed a possible explanation of the term, though before he voiced it, it was already discounted by the remarkable likeness between Betty and the nun which asserted itself in his mind more and more. "Your daughter," he repeated. "You use the term in its spiritual sense, I suppose, madame?"

"No!" said the nun simply. "I am her mother."

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"But—but I have always understood that Betty was an orphan, that—that you——"

The nun smiled sadly. "You have understood that I was dead! That is what Betty has been taught to believe, and for twenty years I have been dead to the world. I have not seen my daughter since she was three years old. All that time I have been up here amid the frost and the snows."

Maurice Endicott did not know what to say. Here was something quite beyond his understanding, and what tragedy lay behind it he could not even dimly guess. But as he stood there something that the woman had said leaped up in his mind, and he asked quickly :

"You said your daughter was up here searching for some one—for a man, I think, you said?"

"Yes," answered the nun, "for a young man—her lover, according to Père Molineau. But you know my daughter, perhaps—you—you——"

Endicott knew what was in her mind, and did not share her thought, but for the moment he did not say so.

"You know this man's name?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "Père Molineau told me. It is Neil Musgrave."

"And that is not my name, madame!" replied Endicott, with a short, harsh laugh.

The woman scarcely noticed the laugh. A musing look came on her sad face. "I wonder if Betty has found him? I wonder where they are? For twenty years I have not seen her, written to her, and to her I was dead as to all the world. But I am anxious for her, so anxious. What Father Molineau told me disturbed me so greatly, that I felt at all costs that I must see her, speak to her, warn her——"

She broke off sharply as voices sounded outside,

one of them Major Andover's, asking a question. On her face came a look of utmost consternation. She grasped Endicott's arm in a way that startled him.

"That voice!" she cried in quick apprehension. "Who—who——"

"It is only a friend of mine," said Endicott soothingly, wondering if the woman were sane.

"His name? His name?" she cried in something very like terror.

"Major Andover!" answered Endicott, too startled even to ask the questions his surging curiosity prompted.

"Jim Andover?"

"Yes, Jim Andover."

Endicott's arm was suddenly released. With something like a moan, the nun turned from him.

"Oh, I must go! I must go at once!"

She moved towards the door; and as she did so it opened, and Major Andover, rifle in hand, stood there framed in the doorway. The nun shrank back, and Andover looked at her in some surprise. Then a change came over his face. He stood there staring as if some ghost of a forgotten past had risen from the grave to meet him. The rifle slid from his grasp and crashed to the floor, unheeded. He lifted his mittened hand to his eyes as if to brush away something that bewildered his sight, then as it fell to his side, he cried in a hoarse, shaking voice:

"You, Margot?"

The nun looked at him dumbly for a moment, and on her face was a strange, shrinking look, as if she beheld something vile and unclean.

"Yes," she said, in a voice quivering with emotion.

"I, whom——"

The emotion surging up checked her utterance.

She stood shaking like one stricken with a palsy, then suddenly collapsed in a swoon. Leaping forward, Endicott caught her as she fell, and lifting her laid her in the bunk in the corner of the cabin. He looked at her, put his hand over her heart, and then spoke :

"A faint, Major! But who is she?"

"My wife!" said the Major with a grim laugh.

"Your wife!" Endicott stared at him in amazement.

"Yes. You thought I was a widower. So I did also—until a moment ago."

"And Betty Marlowe—is she your daughter?"

"Betty Marlowe! What makes you ask that question?" asked the Major sharply.

"Well, that lady is looking for Betty, who is somewhere up here looking for Musgrave; and she asserts that Betty is her daughter whom she has not seen for twenty years."

"Betty Marlowe her daughter!" cried the Major excitedly. "Then she is mine also. I wondered when I saw her in London, for she is so like what that woman her mother was at her age. But I was put off by a cock-and-bull story, and I believed it. There was always a mystery about the supposed deaths of my wife and daughter, but now that we have a resurrection of both I will know the meaning of the business." Andover laughed, a cruel, unpleasant laugh. "It will be strange if I don't get at the truth now. Where does that red-haired ruffian keep his whisky? Oh, there's some in one of those tins, is there? We'll just pour a little in a pannikin, and we'll let Mrs. Andover have a drink."

Endicott was secretly amazed at the brutal tone and words of his companion; but he obeyed instructions, and presently, revived by the pungent spirit, the nun opened her eyes. As her gaze

encountered that of Major Andover, a shudder passed through the woman's frame, and she hastily averted her eyes. The Major did not speak, and after a moment the nun sat upright and then staggered to her feet. She still did not look at Andover, but took a faltering step towards the door.

"Where are you going, Margot?" asked Andover harshly.

"Back to my work," said the nun in a low tone. "Anywhere—away from you!"

There was that in her tones which brought the wrathful and shameful blood to the Major's face, and he stepped forward savagely.

"But I may have something to say to that," he said as the door opened, and Ginger Bob and the Indian dog-driver made their appearance.

"I think not," replied the nun in a stony voice. Then she addressed the Indian: "Ligoun, we will continue our journey, as soon as possible."

The Indian nodded, and his dark eyes looked from his mistress to Endicott and the Major. On the latter they lingered for a moment with something unfathomable in their depths, and Andover divined that if he made any attempt to hinder the woman's going, there would be trouble with her servant. The Indian turned and the nun took a step towards the doorway, then the Major spoke.

"Well," he said, with a sneering laugh, "if I cannot assert my rights as a husband, the privileges of a father yet remain to me. And as I understand my long-lost daughter is in the district——"

The nun swung round. "Oh," she cried, "you will not dare! Even you cannot be so vile as to interfere with her innocent life."

"A father's yearnings——" began the Major sneeringly—only to suffer instant interruption.

"For twenty years I, a mother, have exiled

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myself and have not looked on the face of my child, that she might escape from you, and the evil that is in you ! For twenty years I have been dead, to a single end ! Do you think that I will suffer you to undo what I have done ? You see Ligoun there ? If I told him to throw himself over a cliff to serve me, he would do it ! And if I told him to kill you——”

“ These are pious words from one who——”

“ To have you slain would be no impiety,” flashed the woman. “ You know that ! You are an evil man—but I will not waste words. Listen ! You know me. You have never had occasion to doubt a promise of mine—and I will give you my solemn word that if my little girl is interfered with by you—you shall die.”

As she spoke there was something almost terrible in her aspect ; and to Endicott she seemed like some incarnation of avenging justice. Even the Major was reduced to silence before her, though he stood there with a sneer frozen on his face. Without another word the nun turned and staggered rather than walked through the doorway to the snow outside, and for a moment an odd, uncomfortable silence held the three men in the cabin. It was broken by Ginger Bob.

“ Phew ! ” he whistled. “ Phew ! ”

Then the Major laughed noisily, but there was no mirth in his laughter. “ There is a she-cat of a wife for a man, Maurice, my boy ! ”

But Endicott made no response. He knew that the injured woman outside meant every single word that she had spoken, and further his mind was already busy with the revelation of Betty's paternity. An hour later he was still very thoughtful, and he listened without enthusiasm to a sudden change in his companion's plans.

"I don't care what my wife says or does," explained the Major. "I'm going to find my daughter. She must have a whole mint of money, and I can't have her running about this beastly wilderness in pursuit of a fellow like Musgrave. We can leave Ginger Bob here, if need be, to deal with him ; or we can take him along and maybe Musgrave will follow. Anyhow, I am going to look for my daughter—as any decent father would." He laughed a sudden, wolfish laugh, and Endicott, listening, knew that nothing of affection dictated this sudden change of plans.

CHAPTER XII

THE RED DEATH

SERGEANT FARLEY, the friend of Père Molineau, having been two years in a Northland outpost, had no knowledge whatever of Neil Musgrave's connection with the force in which he himself served, but he had advised McGuire to get in touch with headquarters at Regina.

"If your friend has joined, they will be able to give you all particulars about him. I should make for Dawson. You'll hit the telegraph wire there, and it will be easy to get in touch with Regina."

McGuire discussed the matter with Betty carefully. The Sergeant's advice was good—"sinsible" he called it ; but he made it clear to her that it would be better for her to remain where she was, whilst he made the long journey in quest of information.

"'Twill be the divil av a tramp," he explained, "an' the weather ain't what ye'd call promisin', Miss Betty. I've talked with Father Molineau an' he'll be pleased to accommodate ye till I come back, so——"

But Betty intervened firmly. "No, Pat. I shall not stay here, I shall go with you. I am not afraid of the trail—I quite like it. And besides—who knows?—you might meet Neil on the way."

"In that case the bhoys would burn the snow undher his feet to git to ye! Ye've no need to worry on that score."

"But he couldn't; not if he has enlisted, as we are both so sure that he has. So I shall go."

McGuire laughed. "Ye're a wilful witch," he said. "But I suppose ye'll have to have your own way!"

And so it came about that Betty Marlowe took the trail once more; and two days after, Sister Margot, calling at the Mission, heard the story of her daughter's search from Père Molineau, and consumed with anxiety and a fierce surge of mother-love long repressed started to follow her, on the way meeting with the encounter already recorded.

But all unconscious of these fateful events, McGuire and Betty pursued their journey through the waste, occasionally encountering wild storms, in one of which they completely lost their bearings. When the storm had passed they found themselves on the edge of a small lake, which was not marked upon the map the Irishman carried; and of which neither he nor his Indians knew anything. From the camp which they had made, the Irishman started out to explore, and after two hours came back with news that the lake had outlet in a waterway that made south-west, and which, as he was convinced, would lead them to the river.

"Once we hit that, t'will be plain sailin'," he said. "Anyway we shan't be goin' wide."

They started their journey once more, and had followed the unknown river but a little way, when Betty cried out, "Why, Pat, there is a trading-post!"

The Irishman halted the dog-train and turned to look in the direction indicated. At the top of a creek, with the gloomy pinewoods for background, was a small cabin. No smoke issued from its chimney, no sound of movement came from it; but from a stripped pine-sapling near by flagwise there fluttered a strip of red cotton.

When he caught sight of that makeshift flag, McGuire's face paled, and he looked from it to the faces of his Indians, and there read confirmation of his own fears. The girl noted the pallor of his face, and asked quickly. "What is the matter, Pat?"

"'Tis the sign av pistilence, me dear!"

"Pestilence!"

"Yes, what the voyageurs call 'La Mort Rouge.'"

"The red death! But what——"

"Smallpox!"

"Smallpox!" As she echoed the word Betty's own face blanched with sudden horror. This form of pestilence was the last of all terrors she had thought of, and she was appalled at the idea of it.

"Ut sweeps through the North here, sometimes, comin' from God knows where, an' that bit av red is the sign av it from here to Herschel Island on the Arctic. I didn't know ut was loose up here this winter; but there's nothin' to be done, nothin' in this world, an' anyway, this is a good place to be lavin'. Moosh! Moosh!" he cried to the dogs and cracked his whip.

As the sleds moved forward a grave look settled on his genial face. He had not told Betty, but he entertained not the slightest doubt that there was a dead man in the cabin. It looked like a trapper's abode, and as they pushed on he kept his eyes open, and presently caught sight of a steel trap with a

dead fox in it, half drifted over with snow, and apparently long unvisited. One of his Indians saw it also, and as his dark eyes flashed a meaning glance, McGuire was quite sure. Back there in the cabin was the owner of a trapping-line, who finding himself stricken had hoisted the warning, before death should find him, and who now, still and cold, waited till some hand should give him cleansing burial, by setting the cabin on fire. And with that knowledge into McGuire's heart there struck a little fear. He was as brave as any man who had faced the rigours and dangers of the North. In the first rush of the gold-seekers, when men had been drowned by the score in the Box Canyon and the White Horse Rapids, he had faced both with a light heart, and had ridden the dreaded Mane of the White Horse without turning a hair. Other risks of the wilderness he had taken in the same way, and had laughed at the terrors of nature and wild beasts, and wilder men, but these had been dangers that a man could see and oppose with his own wit and strength. But the Red Terror—the pestilence that walked in darkness, that struck here and there, or ran like fire through dry bush, was another thing. It required a colder courage to meet that, and because Betty was with him, and he was afraid for her, as they drove onward, he felt his heart quaking.

The dead man in the cabin might be an isolated case; or it might be that the whole district was pestilence-smitten, in which case there was danger everywhere. But after two days' travelling without meeting any one or seeing anywhere that warning flag of terror, his fear died down a little; and he persuaded himself that the danger was past. Yet he did not grow careless, and when on the evening of the second day they struck a winter encampment of Indians from whom it was possible to learn his

whereabouts, he took all precautions, and halting shouted to obtain the information he desired.

When it was given him he pushed on once more, and, though it was almost dusk, did not camp until another two miles had been covered. But unknown to him, one of his drivers had recognised the Indians as relatives of his own, and in the night stole back to visit them. Nothing was said of this furtive call, and rejoicing at their immunity McGuire went on his way his old gay self.

A few nights later, however, McGuire found himself shivering in a rigor, and, when it passed, was conscious of feverishness and a violent headache.

"Mother av God!" he whispered to himself, and lay staring up at the frosty stars with terror in his eyes. There were other symptoms that troubled him, and after a little time he rose and deliberately carried his sleeping-bag to the other side of the fire from where the girl's tent was pitched. In the morning he was worse, and in no condition for travelling, and when Betty approached him, he shouted to her a warning, "Kape away, Miss Betty, for the love av God, kape away!"

But Betty refused to listen to the warning. She guessed what the Irishman feared, and pity and regard for him were stronger than all fear.

"Kape off, I tell ye!" he shouted as she stood looking down upon him. "Can't ye see, girl——"

"No," answered Betty, "and if I could it would make no difference."

"Ye're a jewel to say ut, Miss Betty. But ye must go away. Tak' one av the Indians an' work back to Father Molineau's. There's no scarlet plague there, but this is a stricken land. Do ye hear? Ye must go, I tell ye."

Betty's reply to all this was to have her little tent cleared of all her personal possessions, and then to

make it warmer by erecting a large wind-screen. That done she ordered the two Indians to carry him into the tent ; which, in spite of his protests, was done. Then, looking in on him from the tent door, she addressed him.

" Listen to me, Pat McGuire ! I don't know what is the matter with you ; and in one sense I don't care. What I want to impress upon you is that you must get well. You can't go and leave me in this wilderness with a couple of natives to take charge of me. You've simply got to do it—for my sake. Understand that, Pat."

" I undershtand," answered McGuire, " but 'tis ye I'm thinkin' av, Miss Betty. I know fwat's got me, an' ye know too. Ye must go, girl, go ! I won't have ye risk your life—an' the beauty av ye for me. The bhoy would never forgive me ! "

" And I could never look him in the face again if I left you here with a couple of natives who will desert you when they find out what has befallen you ! So there ! "

" But——"

" There is no but. That is the end of it, Pat McGuire."

And the end of it it was. In a couple of days there was no question as to what was the matter with the Irishman. He had the dread disease in its mild form, though neither he nor Betty knew that it was of that character ; and the morning after this settling of all doubts, one of the Indians had disappeared ; the one who had stolen back to visit his relatives, and who was probably the means by which the sickness had been brought to his employer. With him had gone one of the sleds and a team of dogs. The other Indian, however, remained, and with him Betty had what she would have called a good talk. She pointed out that McGuire was

doing well, that in a few days the disease would have run its course, and that he would not forget faithful service ; whilst in any case, having already been in the area of contagion, there was nothing to be gained by flight. The native listened carefully, marked the fact that she herself was not afraid, and then signified that he meant to stay. Betty was immensely relieved by this decision, and then set the man gathering green spruce boughs with which over a small fire she contrived to make a big smoke in which she and the Indian fumigated themselves night and morning. Whether it was of any real use or not she did not know ; but she hoped it was, and in any case it gave the Indian faith in her " medicine," and that was a great gain

* * * * *

About the time that Pat McGuire made the discovery of the dread thing which had befallen him, Major Andover and Maurice Endicott were leaving the whisky-trader's cabin, Ginger Bob accompanying them.

" You don't know the country, gents," he explained, " an' I do. Et's no sort of use thinkin' that all yer've got ter do es ter walk outside, an' then yer'll tumble on ther trail of this girl—an' McGuire. A needle in a hay-field es a simple proposition ter the one yer are up against, unless yer go the right way about it."

" Then what is the right way ? " asked the Major.

" Well, et's like this According to that nun's statement she'd come straight down from Father Molineau's mission, and had lost ther trail of McGuire in a snowstorm. Well, et's a dead cert that McGuire hadn't come down this way or we'd hev seen him, wouldn't we—seen him or tumbled on his trail somewhere. But we have done neither ;

an' as ther news-sheets say ther inference es that he ain't come this way at all. An' that's an inference supported by other considerations."

"What are they?" inquired Endicott.

"Well, yer see, gents, traffic in thes country runs along well-defined lines. Ther main river es ther main street, an' as I remember hearing one of them professors from McGill sayin' once, ther course of civilisation es along the valleys of ther great rivers. Et's true enough. Summer an' winter traffic follers ther widest road; an' all those little riveis an' waterways es just so many little streets an' back lanes leadin' ter the main street. See!"

"Yes. But I don't understand what——"

"That," interrupted Ginger Bob, with a jerk of his thumb towards the river, "es one of ther back-lanes—very back. In ther whole bloomin' year ther ain't a score of men goes up an' down it. That's why this cabin's here—for privacy. Now it ain't in ther least likely that McGuire knows this river, an' if he did he'd gain nothin' by travellin' this way. Naturally he'd make for ther main street an' a well-packed trail——"

"In which case we shall have missed him?"

"That's whar the spokes rattle in yer wheels," replied the whisky-runner with a grin. "North of here ther main river makes a big bend; and the country between whar et bends an' straightens itself out again ain't no sort of country for dog-teams, so naturally McGuire will stick to ther main river, an' naturally he won't travel express hevin' a young leddy with him; an' naturally ef we make a straight cut across country to well below ther bend, et's a royal flush hand thet we meet him before he gets further south. See!"

"But we don't know where McGuire was making for," objected the Major.

"Nope! But that nun-woman was makin' south an' believed herself on McGuire's trail. So et's a fair inference——"

"'Pon my word I believe you're right," said the Major.

"Yer can bet yer mits upon it, Colonel. An' there's another point. If I know Bill he's circlin' round west an' south with that silly Mounter at his heels leadin' him back here. I guess havin' a start he won't hurry, but just keep ther distance of maybe a couple of camps between him an' the Mounter, an' strikin' straight across we're likely to meet one or ther other of them—which, et don't matter much, for ef et's Bill then we jest wait for ther Mounter, an' ef et's ther Mounter—well, yer see ther added attraction, gents! Two bears with one shot—an' Bill an' me an' all of us relieved from anxiety. See!"

Both the Major and Endicott had seen, and so it fell out that Ginger Bob had accompanied them on their cross-country march to intercept McGuire and Betty Marlowe. And at the fourth camp of their march there happened one of the encounters that Ginger Bob had anticipated.

The evening meal had been eaten, and the three were seated about the fire, when from the wood in front there came the sudden snap of a dry bough. Instantly all three were on the alert.

"A moose or a—— Holy smoke!"

Their camp was pitched in a little glade and from the shadows of the trees on to the white carpet of the snow in the glade had emerged the form of a man. His features could not yet be discerned, but he walked with swinging strides and carried himself in the manner of a man who has passed through the hands of a drill sergeant

"That blamed Mounter, or I——"

Ginger Bob did not finish his remark, "Kick ther fire!" he whispered to the Major, and as the latter obeyed him sending up a sudden scurry of smoke and sparks, he stretched a hand for his rifle, and slipped out of the firelight into the shadow of the trees.

The two men whom he had left sat watching the on-coming man tensely. He advanced with confidence, as though assured that he had nothing to fear, and whilst still five yards away gave them greeting.

"Good evening, gentlemen!"

At the sound of his voice, Endicott gave a start, and the Major looked quickly round into the darkness. Then Endicott replied, in an embarrassed voice to which he strove in vain to give a tone of surprise:

"Surely that is Musgrave?"

He rose to his feet as he spoke, inadvertently covering Musgrave from Ginger Bob, and Neil Musgrave cried aloud:

"You, Maurice!"

Neil's surprise was genuine, and Endicott managed to laugh shakily. "Yes! And here's Andover also. We're up here for a little shooting trip."

There was a cracked false note in his voice, which instantly took Musgrave's notice; and suddenly through his mind flashed Betty's warning. Instantly he was on his guard. He looked at the Major and caught a gleam in his eyes that was almost tigerish. He knew in that moment that Betty's fears had not been without justification, and that for some reason that he did not understand he was in peril, but he stood his ground.

"You two are up here alone?" he inquired carelessly.

Maurice Endicott hesitated and made a little

move—but did not speak. It was the Major who replied, "Yes! Alone! I'm an old campaigner in this country, you know, Musgrave. But what are you yourself doing up here?"

"Oh," answered Neil easily, "I am serving in the Royal Nor'-West Police."

As he replied his eyes were busy searching the camp. Endicott's hesitation had not been lost upon him; and he was almost certain that the Major had lied in answering his question; for he had seen, or had thought he had seen a third man withdraw.

"Oh! A policeman," said the Major offensively.

"As you say, a——"

He broke off as he caught the expression on Maurice Endicott's face. What on earth was the matter with him? He was expecting something, what—— A swift intuition of danger made him leap across the fire, and as he did so there came the crang-g-g of a rifle out of the shadows behind the camp. A bullet whistled overhead through the glade, and in the same instant there came a yell of fear and surprise from the wood. The three sounds were practically simultaneous, and in the second before he sprang for the wood after the man who had fired, Musgrave flashed a glance at the Major. The latter had risen. On his face was a look of mingled malevolence and consternation; and Neil knew from that look that all the danger had not been hidden in the wood. But he did not linger to ask questions. Plunging into the shadows, he made wonderingly for a point from which came the sounds of struggle, and where a half-strangled voice filled the night with blasphemous oaths.

CHAPTER XIII

BETTY FINDS A FATHER

AS Musgrave was disappearing into the forest, Major Andover lifted a hand which held a pistol, but Endicott threw himself in front "Hold on! Don't! There is some one else in the wood! He must have seen what happened. If we——"

He broke off as the sound of running feet reached them, and half a minute later Ginger Bob broke into the circle of firelight.

"Quit!" he said sharply, without slackening his pace. "Due west!" He disappeared again in the shadows, and the Major looked at Endicott.

"I think not," he said. "Musgrave is here, and this is our opportunity. If we stalk him in the wood, Ginger Bob will get the blame, and——"

"But the other man!" whispered Endicott. "We don't know who he was. The risk is too great. It may be another policeman——"

"Musgrave was alone!"

"Was, yes! But he may have been reinforced. What was that man doing in the wood, if that is not the case? The best thing is to move on as that ruffian said. Ginger Bob has some game in his mind. No doubt he is expecting to get away in the darkness, and is anticipating that Musgrave will pick up the trail in the morning and follow him. He'll wait for him somewhere, ambush him, and then—— Why should we take unnecessary risks? Let us move on. That other man in the wood——"

He broke off, and turning to where the dogs were sleeping in the snow, roused them, and began to fit the harness on them. Whilst he was doing so;

the Major stared savagely into the blackness of the forest, whence drifted occasional sounds of movement. He recognised that there was much in what his companion said, and he stood there the prey of baffled hate. He spoke no word until the dogs were ready, and then he said : " There's nothing else for it. But if I had that fellow who was in the wood——"

He broke off, and as his companion started the team, a morose look settled on his face.

Endicott drove the dogs hard, using the lash freely. No sounds now reached them from the forest, and they appeared to be the only moving creatures in that frozen world. But as they travelled, the younger man continually looked back into the darkness. To him it seemed full of menace, and though he said nothing to Andover, he was afraid. His imagination concerned itself with that mysterious man in the wood. Who was he ? What had he been doing just where he was at the precise moment when Ginger Bob had fired ? He must have been with Musgrave ; he must have been watching the camp ! And Musgrave himself had known what was happening, or why had he leaped as he had in that fateful moment, and so saved himself ? His mind made no allowance for that mysterious sense of danger which often awakens in men in perilous moments, and as he reviewed the events of the night, he convinced himself that somehow Musgrave was aware of their plans ; and he asked himself if it were only the whisky-runner whom the policeman was pursuing ? He could not be sure ; and as his mind harked back to the mysterious man in the wood, the vague fears of which he was conscious grew more pronounced. When something cracked in the forest to the left of their route, he halted, with a sudden cry.

" What was that ? "

"A tree bursting with the frost," answered the Major coolly. "It often happens up here. What did you think it was?"

"It sounded like a pistol-shot! I thought that perhaps Ginger Bob——"

"I wish he had!" cried the Major, answering the uncompleted thought.

It began to snow; but as the character of the country changed, the woods growing thinner, and steep hills lifting themselves on either hand, they pushed steadily on. The snow increased, sweeping on them before a rising wind in a blinding sheet of hard ice-like particles. The dogs floundered, and the Major, who was breaking trail, lost all sense of direction, and following the line of least resistance, took to a valley that offered shelter from the icy wind.

"We shall have to camp," he said to his companion. "This will kill us if we keep on."

They went forward for a little while longer, and then halted and made a camp. It was difficult to get a fire going, but at last they succeeded, and as they crouched in front of it, warming themselves with steaming coffee, their backs to the storm, the Major gave a grim laugh.

"We've seen the last of Ginger Bob for a certainty. He can't possibly get away in this stuff; and he's neither dogs nor grub. He can't follow our trail, for the snow will obliterate it in half an hour, and we're out of the line that we should be in, so if he tries to overtake us—he'll go wrong! This storm may last for days, and Ginger will be frozen carrion by morning. He—— Great Scot! What was that? Did you hear?"

"I heard nothing!" said Endicott, looking round into the smother of snow with a shiver.

"I thought I heard dogs yelping!" said the Major,

with his head in a listening attitude. A moment later he spoke again. "I must have been mistaken. No one but a madman would try to travel in this blizzard."

The storm lasted three whole days, during which they were kept to the camp which they had made, and when on the night of the third day it broke, the moon rose in the sky rimmed with crimson. The Major looked at it and shivered. He knew that the crimson rim meant bitter cold, the cold of the outer places which is like no other cold on earth.

"This place will be a frozen inferno by morning," he said as he heaped logs on the fire. "But the frost will harden the snow crust, and we should be able to travel." It grew steadily colder through the night, so much so that Endicott shivered in his sleeping-bag, and in the morning there was a rising wind and a leaden sky.

"No use," said Andover, as he considered the signs. "There's a fresh storm brewing, and if we pulled out we might be driven to camp in an hour. Good thing we've plenty of grub."

They settled themselves once more to wait. Somewhere from the waste came the howl of wolves on the meat-trail, and the Major looked at his rifle.

"I'm sick of doing nothing," he said. "From that sound this is a game country, and if only the weather would hold for an hour— By—! Did you hear that?"

"What—"

"A rifle-shot in the wind! I'll swear I heard it!"

"Scarcely likely, is it?" asked Endicott. "Much more likely to be one of those bursting trees!"

"No!" said the Major. "It was different. I'm going to have a look round."

Their camp was pitched in the lee of a fairly

high hill, and with his head bent to the wind, Andover began to climb. When he reached the summit he looked round on a world that, save for the dark trunks of the pines, was covered with a blanket of unbroken white. His first glance was for the valley from which he had ascended. From the height where he stood he could see that it was bounded by a hill that had a formidable appearance and realised that unless it had some hidden opening, through one of the smaller valleys which seemed to branch from it the valley in which they were encamped was a mere cul-de-sac.

Having ascertained that, he turned in the other direction, and saw that the hills, less steep on the further side, sloped down to a fairly wide valley, along which he traced the course of a river. A dark spot, far out across the snow, caught his eyes, and he watched it intently. It might be a man, or some beast of the wilderness, or some inanimate object which the wind had swept clear of snow, in the freakish way that it sometimes will. Stamping his feet to keep from freezing, he kept his eyes fixed upon the dark blotch, marking it between two points on the further side of it; and presently he saw that it had moved from one to the other. Whatever it was, it lived. His eye travelled further along the river valley, and came unexpectedly upon another blotch on the snow, and on something which at first he took to be a whirling spiral of snow, but which he suddenly realised was the smoke of a fire. He had not been mistaken, after all. The report that he had heard had been that of a rifle; and across there, far up this other valley, was an encampment of some sort.

A scurry of snow in the wind drove him down the hill back to camp. As he entered it, Endicott looked up from a meal that he was preparing.

"See anything, Major?"

Andover nodded. "Yes! We have neighbours in the wilderness. On the other side of this hill there is a river, and some distance up it there is an encampment."

"An encampment! Whom can it belong to?"

"Don't know!" laughed the Major. "There are more dwellers in the wilderness than ever know each other. The North is so thundering big! But I think it will be worth our while to try and get in touch with these campers, whoever they are. You see, we're lost: and without Ginger Bob I don't quite see how we're going to find ourselves, unless we can get information to go upon. So if the snow will keep off, I think we might try to make the camp I have seen."

"Suppose it is Musgrave who——"

"That's not at all likely—worse luck! He would spend some time picking up Ginger Bob's trail; and we pushed out immediately. Allowing for the fact that we lost our way, he is scarcely likely to have got so far ahead of us; for the storm would delay him, as it delayed us."

"Yes! I suppose that would be the case!"

"As before we resume operations it is essential that we should discover our whereabouts, we can't do better than climb the hill, and make for the camp up the river. When we have found ourselves we can decide on a further course of action."

"Yes," agreed Endicott. "And as the snow seems to be keeping off, the earlier we start the better. I am tired of hanging about this camp."

The Major looked at the clouds overhead. He was a little doubtful of the weather, but he agreed. "We might risk it."

Having reached this decision they struck camp, and after great toil succeeded in getting the sled

up the hill. From that, Andover pointed out the position of the camp he had observed, and then, descending the slope, they turned up-stream, and began the march towards it.

The going was difficult. The snow was still soft, and Andover moving ahead found the trail-breaking difficult work. Swinging his whole weight first on one foot, then on the other, and at each step sinking deep in the soft snow, was exhausting work, and at the end of a quarter of an hour he was glad to yield the place to his younger companion. So, taking turn and turn about, they moved up the white waste towards the distant camp. Except for the crunch of the snow-shoes, the creaking of the sled, the panting of the dogs, and the occasional detonation of a bursting tree, they moved in a world that was silent and dead, and were, to all appearances, the only living creatures in that white wilderness. No moving black dots on the river's frozen surface revealed life of either man or beast, and the encampment towards which they travelled was quite invisible from the river trail which was the lowest point in the landscape.

The banks of the river grew gradually higher, closing them in from the wide wastes, and to Endicott, who was leading, it seemed that they were walking between high walls, and compelled willy-nilly to move forward for ever. Each step that he took was like that of a treadmill, and the advance made no difference whatever. One step taken with the knee lifted high—another remained, and there was no promise of relief until they should reach a camping place.

A gust of ice-cold wind came down the funnel made by the snowy banks, and with it came a scurry of snow. The Major, who was at the gee-pole, cried out to Endicott :

"It's coming ! We shall have to hurry, Maurice. This is no place to be caught."

As Endicott quickened the pace a little, the Major anxiously surveyed the banks. Their character had gradually changed, and now they were bald stone bastions like the ramparts of the Peace River. There was no scaling them, no turning aside to camp until they had won through the gorge ; they would have to keep on at any cost, or freeze.

The wind grew stronger. A fine impalpable snow drifted from the high ledges filling the gorge with a mist that was made up of snow-dust, and with it mingled heavier snow that joined with the other made an impenetrable veil. Endicott could not see a yard in front of him, and Andover could not see Endicott at all. But somehow the dogs managed to keep the trail and floundered on with heads lowered to the storm, and occasionally whining as they bent to the collars. Through the dense whirling clouds they pushed their way, numbed and blinded, half choked by the snow-dust, then Endicott gave a shout. They were clear of the defile. The banks of the river were opening out, and though the storm was still a menace, it would now be possible to camp. They still pushed on looking for a desirable place, that would offer both wood and shelter ; and then most unexpectedly they came upon the camp which they had started to find.

Through the snow-mirk they caught sight first of a great fire, then of a small tent with a wind screen constructed partly of pine boughs and partly of blankets, and even as they became aware of the camp, a woman's figure loomed through the mirk. As he halted, Endicott had no thought but that the woman was an Indian, though the canvas tent puzzled him a little. He moved towards the woman who had halted as she caught sight of

him. Her antics surprised him. She was pointing and gesticulating at something, and presently he made out that it was some sort of flag which cracked and flapped in the wind. What the flag was he could not make out. Through the snow clouds he caught sight of a glimpse of red, but it conveyed nothing to his uninitiated mind, and as Andover joined him he took a step forward. Then he caught sight of the woman's face, and as he made the recognition cried out in amazement:

"Betty!"

"Yes," shouted Betty. "Yes—and you must go away at once; we have smallpox in the camp."

At the word, Endicott cringed and shrank back, and therewith earned Betty's contempt. But Major Andover took his place.

"Who has the disease?" he asked sharply.

"Pat McGuire, my friend and guide," answered Betty, moving into the shelter of the wind screen.

"Are you alone with him?"

"No! There is an Indian, who——"

"Then you must come away at once," said the Major in a peremptory voice. "I cannot allow you to remain here!"

"You cannot allow——" Betty broke off in amazement.

"That is what I said," answered Andover, still with the hectoring note in his voice. "I cannot allow you to remain here facing grave risks. You must come at once."

Betty was conscious of surging indignation. Never in all her life had she been so addressed, and there was hot resentment in her voice as she answered, "I shall do nothing of the kind. Pat McGuire is my friend, and with him I stay. Besides, I have yet to learn by what authority you presume to dictate to me my actions."

"You may accept my assurances that my authority is sound," answered the Major with a sudden sharp laugh.

"But I do not know——"

"It is one that has the sanction of both nature and the law of God and man," answered Andover with another laugh.

Betty stared at him in wonderment. "I am afraid I do not understand."

"No? But after all the explanation is very simple. Girl, I am your father!"

For a moment Betty continued to stare at him dumbly, then, as if in protest, she cried out, "No! No!"

"Yes! yes!" said the Major. "A surprise to you, no doubt, but the truth nevertheless. You are my daughter—and in this matter I claim your obedience."

"But I do not know——" began Betty, repeating herself, and then broke off and looked at Maurice Endicott.

"Is this true?"

"Without a doubt," answered Endicott. "Major Andover is your father."

Through Betty's mind the thoughts surged like a river in flood. Her dead aunt's antipathy to the Major, and her anxiety as to the purpose of his journey; Mr. Bouchard's concern at discovering she was acquainted with him, his pronounced dislike of the Major and his warning against continuing the acquaintance, a multitude of little things of childhood; her utter lack of information concerning her presumably dead father; her aunt's statement of Major Andover's inability to believe his eyes when he had seen her in London, all surged within and helped to induce conviction. Still she would not believe.

"But why was I not told before? If you are my father, why did you not——"

"Because," intervened the Major, "I did not know of your existence until recently. I had been led to believe that you were dead, by those who wished to keep us apart. Believe me, I can prove all that I say, and will do so at the proper time. But just now you must take my word for it; and I must insist on your leaving this stricken camp."

"But I will not," flashed Betty. "I am of age, and I can please myself. I will not leave Pat! He is recovering, but he needs care yet, and if the Indian were taken ill, what would they do? Besides, I do not want to go with you—even if you are—my—my—even if things are as you say. My aunt warned me against you! Mr. Bouchard also! There must be some very good reason for them to do that—and I shall go to Mr. Bouchard, and ask him what the reason is, before I acknowledge your claim in any way. I shall stay here."

She turned away and moved towards the tent. Both Andover and Endicott guessed that McGuire was in there, and as she made to enter, Endicott cried out:

"Betty, don't! Come away. The risk——"

The girl did not even look at him, but passed into the tent.

"What are we to do, Major?" asked Endicott desperately.

"Camp. Whilst we consider matters," answered the Major sharply.

"Here?"

"No! Further up-stream. There is no need for us to take unnecessary risks."

Through the still howling storm, they forced their way about three hundred yards, and then pitched

a camp. Over the fire, as they talked, Endicott expressed a conviction.

"I know Betty better than you do, Major. She will never leave McGuire of her own accord."

"No? She appears to be self-willed, this daughter of mine. Nevertheless I shall have my way."

"How will you get it?"

"Oh!" answered the Major with a little laugh, "I shall exercise a father's authority."

"Betty will laugh at you! You heard her just now. She——"

"She will not be able to please herself. Up here a father's authority is boundless"—again the Major laughed—"and if I take her with me by force——"

"You will carry her off?" cried Endicott.

"I believe that elegant phrase is the customary one used to describe the action I have in contemplation."

"But——" began Endicott, then checked himself as he saw a possible advantage in the situation the Major was about to create.

"But—what, Maurice, my boy?"

"Oh, nothing! Only it doesn't look to me a very easy business."

"It is as easy as shelling peas."

"There's the Indian."

"Tied to that camp, by his devotion to McGuire, I presume, or he wouldn't have stayed there."

"There's McGuire himself!"

"Pooh—a sick man. Out of the reckoning."

"But when you have got Betty, what——"

"I'll get her first; and discuss afterwards. She's my daughter, and I crave for her society. Besides blood is thicker than water. She will quite probably become reconciled to our society, and once she is

away from that uncouth Irishman, she may even be grateful to us for delivering her."

"I do not think that is likely," said Endicott doubtfully. "I know Betty and you do not."

"If she is anything like her mother," answered the Major with a grim laugh, "I know her very well." The younger man fell silent for a time, and when he spoke again there was a new expression on his face.

"But where do I come in, Major?"

The Major looked at him as if he did not understand, then comprehension came to him. "Oh," he laughed, "you are my prospective son-in-law, of course." Endicott sat for a little while without speaking. The Major glancing at him, wondered what was in his mind, and laughed with relief when he spoke.

"You will not expect me to help you in the—er—abduction."

"My dear boy, we won't prejudice your case that way. I alone will be responsible for the deed. You, if you like, can pose as the champion of the distressed damsel. Not that I expect her to be distressed for long. I do not so underrate my own powers of charm."

And so it fell that in the small hours of the morning, two days later, Major Andover staggered into camp with his daughter, securely fastened in her sleeping-bag, over his shoulder. The dogs were ready harnessed, and Maurice Endicott stood by whilst the Major bound his daughter to the sled, speculating as to the chances of a plan which was already forming in his mind. Then with but a single glance backward to the camp where McGuire and the Indian still slept, they moved off into the darkness, the team travelling at a rattling pace.

CHAPTER XIV

A PERILOUS SITUATION

WHEN Neil Musgrave sprang into the wood after the man who had fired on him, he was a little confused by the darkness; but helped by the sounds that reached him, he came to a small dead-fall near which two men were struggling. As he ran to them, a branch of one of the fallen trees tripped him into the snow; and when he picked himself up, the two men had separated and were running in opposite directions. For a brief second he hesitated, and then started to follow the nearest man. The fellow, however, proved most elusive, and presently in the darkness of the forest he lost sight of him altogether; and prudence told him that it was unwise to continue an aimless pursuit, for to be lost, without the means of life, in a sub-arctic forest would be the worst of fates.

Desisting, therefore, he began reluctantly enough to try to retrace his steps. It was no easy matter, for the man whom he had followed had twisted and turned as the various obstacles in his way had dictated, and the heavy pall of snow on the thick branches of the spruce and firs made the recesses of the forest very dark. Presently, however, he caught sight of a glow in the darkness ahead; and guessing it to be made by the camp-fire where he had left Andover and Endicott, he began to travel in that direction.

He moved cautiously. Betty's warning words had now assumed a rather lurid significance and the look that he had surprised on the Major's face as he had risen after the shot had told him that Betty's fears were far from groundless. That

Andover was a partner in the attempt upon his life he was convinced, though why he should be puzzled him sorely. He did not know what to make of the matter, but the conviction that the attempt had been made with the Major's cognisance made him careful, and it was fully a quarter of an hour after observing the glow that he found himself at the far end of the little glade where the Major's camp was pitched. From the shadow of a giant fir, he made a careful reconnoitre.

The glade was empty of life. The fire still burned, but the sled that had been near it was gone. Andover and Endicott had fled. So convinced was he that such was the case, that leaving his concealment he stepped into the open, and walked to the fire. Kicking the logs to make them blaze, he examined the tracks about the fire to make sure. The examination eliminated all doubt. There was the track of the sled running westward, and so fresh that the frost-crystals had not yet had time to form in the trail made by the runners. Instantly he decided to follow. It was possible that the third man, who had fired the shot, had already joined them; and in any case he could demand an explanation from Endicott and the Major.

Turning he walked swiftly down the glade, making for the point where he had left his own team when he had seen the glow ahead, which had warned him that some one was camped in the neighbourhood. He had more than half expected to find the whisky-runner of whom he was in pursuit, and had been surprised to find three men encamped; and now as he made for his team, he was convinced that the man who had withdrawn into the wood and made the attempt upon his life, was indeed his quarry. The association of the latter with Endicott and Andover puzzled him; and the thought of the

fourth man who had been in the wood perplexed him greatly. It was quite clear that this fourth man had attacked the man who had fired the shot ; from which he argued that he had no connection with Andover's party ; but who he was and what he was doing in the wood so opportunely was beyond all conjecture.

So thinking, he reached the place where he had left his team and then had a great shock. The dogs and sled were gone. For a second he stared unbelievably, then looked slowly round to make sure that he had not mistaken the place. No ! there was no mistake ! There was the great outcrop of rock on one side, and the fallen tree on the other ! This was indeed the place.

With a pardonable tremor shaking him he drew off his fur mitten and felt for his matches. By the flimsy light that they afforded him he examined the snow. There was the place where the dogs had stood, and the place where the sled had lain when he had turned it over on its side to anchor the team when he had gone forward to investigate. But the sled had been righted, and there were the footmarks of the man who had done it—the man who had stolen his outfit and left him to perish of hunger and cold. The team, as further investigation revealed, had moved forward in the line that he had originally been following, and as the full realisation of all that the situation meant broke upon him, he stood there appalled, stark fear clutching at his heart.

How long he stood contemplating the fate which beset him he never knew ; but after a time the necessity for instant action awoke within him ; and he started to follow the trail of his stolen dog-team, moving forward with desperate haste. He knew that at all costs he must overtake the thief. His

own life would be the penalty of failure to do so, death in the snow, of hunger and cold.

He followed for perhaps three-quarters of an hour, moving so quickly that in spite of the intense cold he sweated freely, and his eyebrows and eyelashes became coated with ice, then for a second time that night he caught the glow of a fire. It lay away to the left, and for a few seconds he stared at it unbelievably and his first thought was that it was an illusion. His second thought was that the thief had moved in a half-circle back to the camp-fire in the glade. Of that, however, he was anything but sure, for so desperate was the necessity for overtaking his team, that he had given not the slightest attention to the direction it was going. For a moment he hesitated, then marking the position of the sled-trail well, he made a bee-line in the direction of the fire.

As he approached it, he soon saw that he had been mistaken in the conjecture that it was the fire he had left an hour ago. That one had been in the open; this one was in a little hollow that was surrounded by trees; and as he crept towards it, he saw a man bending over it apparently engaged in cooking a meal. A small sled stood in the circle of the firelight, and three husky-dogs crouched in the snow with their noses towards the fire. For a few seconds he stood watching, uncertain what course to pursue, then deciding that he would interview the man he began to move towards the camp. As he did so one of the dogs lifted its head, sniffed, and gave a wolfish bark.

Instantly the man, who was stooping over the fire, stood upright; and as the firelight fell upon his face, Musgrave saw that he was an Indian. Calling out to him to reassure him, the policeman moved forward, and as he stepped into the circle of fire-

light saw what looked like a gleam of recognition leap in the Indian's eyes.

"How!" said the Indian in greeting; then added words that startled the white man. "So you me find!"

Musgrave looked at him in amazement, then swiftly looked round the camp. His sled and dogs were certainly not there. He looked back at the Indian.

"I do not understand," he said.

"I the man you follow in the wood back there." The Indian waved his hand towards the darkness behind Musgrave. "You follow the wrong man."

"The wrong man!"

"Yes. I see the bad white man leave the fire as you go towards it. He take gun with him, an, I watch, close by him. He not see me, an' as he shoot to keel you, I knock the rifle up. Then I seize him, but he ver' strong; he break away and because I not want the man in the camp to see me, I run from you—an' them."

"But what were you doing there in the wood?" asked Musgrave quickly.

"I watch the men. They are bad men."

"But why do you watch?"

"I watch for Sister Margot; I am her servant."

"Sister Margot!" Musgrave was puzzled. "Who is Sister Margot? What has she to do with these men?"

"I know not. She tell me to watch, to follow. I obey. The men look for a white girl, for whom Sister Margot looks also. I follow them. That is all I know."

"And you did not steal my team?"

"So!" said the Indian, not troubling to make a denial. "The team has been stolen?"

"Yes! I was on the trail of it when I saw your fire."

"You are of the police?"

"As you say."

"And if you take this dog-thief?"

"He will be punished."

"That is good! And I help you to take him. Hear, brother, the man who make kill you, he take the dogs. He, or the man with him. They will travel together, we will find them. They travel through the woods to the great river. That do I know, for I have followed for days. We will eat and rest, then will we go. You think that good?"

"Yes! unless we can start at once."

The Indian shook his head. "The dogs are tired. I also. These men not go far. In a little time it snow. It is in the air. I feel it. They will make camp; we also. When the snow is over I find the trail and we follow. That is good?"

Impatient as Musgrave felt, he could not but acknowledge that the Indian was right. Accordingly he schooled himself to wait, thankful that he had escaped the harsh death of the wilderness which had threatened him; and wondering much what the mysterious Sister Margot had to do with Andover and Endicott. As he sat in front of the fire reviewing recent events a thought struck him, and he turned to the Indian.

"Do you know who the man was who fired at me from the wood? Have you ever seen him before to-night?"

The Indian nodded gravely. "Once before have I seen him! In a cabin on the Little River. He trade the waters that make men sing and fight. He is call by strange name. Ginger Bob!"

"Ginger Bob!"

Musgrave stared at the Indian in amazement, who on his part met the stare with impassive gaze.

"He is known to you?"

"Known to me! He is the man I am after."

"Then we find him."

"We must!"

"After it snow, he will not fear your coming. He think you dead. He will be careless. We find him ver' easy."

The policeman did not immediately reply. For quite a long time he sat considering the news that he had heard, then more to himself than to his companion he cried: "But what is he doing with Andover and Endicott?"

"I not know," answered the Indian. "He is bad man. They bad mans."

To Musgrave this explanation was scarcely sufficient, and he fell into thought again from which he was presently aroused by the Indian's voice.

"The snow! Behold."

The storm in which Andover and Endicott lost their way, and by which they were driven to camp, had broken; and such was its fury that it was not until the fourth day that the Indian decided to make a start. The outlook was not cheering. There was the promise of further snow in the sky, and an unbroken trail before them; and it was doubtful how long they would be able to travel; but to Musgrave anything seemed better than sitting there inactive.

"We follow the trail to the great river. The bad mans they go thither," said the Indian, and the policeman surrendered himself completely to his guidance.

Taking turns about at breaking the trail, they pushed on, and had been travelling scarcely two hours, when the Indian, who was leading, gave a grunt of satisfaction, and stopping pointed at the snow. A fresh sled-trail was visible, and stooping he considered the tracks of the dogs' feet.

"How many dogs you lose?" he asked.

"Four!" answered Musgrave.

"Four there be!" said the other, "but those mans have six."

A puzzled look came on his face, and turning in the direction from which the sled-trail led he began to follow it, and presently disappeared from Musgrave's sight among the trees. Quarter of an hour later he returned. His grave face was as impassive as ever; but there was a gleam of satisfaction in his dark eyes.

"I find camp," he said. "One man camp. He not have found the other mans when the snow came. He wait until snow stop, then he go to find them. The fire still warm. We hurry, we find him, first."

To Musgrave the Indian's reasoning seemed sound enough, and they pushed on once more, following the broadly marked trail, which even the fleeing criminal must leave behind him in the white North. The scent was a hot one, and Musgrave felt the excitement mounting within him. In an hour, two hours at most, Ginger Bob would be in his hands.

Then the wind began to blow in icy gusts, and with the wind came the snow. For a little while the Indian pressed on, but as the blizzard grew in force, it became impossible to see more than a yard ahead, impossible to follow the trail which the fleeing whisky-trader had left. Reaching a sheltered place, the Indian halted.

"Camp!" he said laconically.

Musgrave's impatience surged in protest, but wisdom told him that to camp was the only thing to do, and he made no objection. His companion pointed along the already half-obliterated trail.

"The bad man he camp too! We find him to-morrow or the day after."

Again they were compelled to wait until the storm blew itself out ; but at the first available moment, they recommenced their journey, and travelled a long time over an absolutely unbroken surface of snow, without finding any sign of the fugitive Ginger. The thick woods opened out, and before them was a plain rolling to the hills perhaps a couple of miles away, and as he considered the snow-covered landscape, the Indian halted and looked back.

" Maybe he not come this way ! Maybe he lazy mans who sleep much, and we pass him."

But even as he spoke the denial was given to his words. Through the still air, faint, yet distinctly audible came the sharp yelp of a dog. Instantly the Indian tautened to attention. His dark eyes swept the plain, north and south, east and west, and then passed onward to the hills. For a full three minutes he searched, then he gave a grunt of satisfaction and his arm shot out.

" There ! "

Neil Musgrave's gaze followed the line of the mittened hand. But at first he saw nothing, save the white hills with their darker patches of forest or outcropping rocks. The Indian gave minute directions, then, moving up the side of the hill, his eyes discerned a line of black dots, with a larger dot moving in front—a dog-train unquestionably.

" Must have made a quick way through the woods ! " said the Indian. " He go to the river that way. We follow, soon. Now we wait."

Calling to the dogs he led the way to a clump of trees in the lee of which he made a small fire, and boiled coffee.

" But why do we wait ? " protested Neil.

" He see us if we cross the flat. Wait till he go round the hill, then he not know we follow."

The policeman was compelled to admit the wisdom of this course, and to abide by the Indian's plan. Sipping the steaming coffee he stood in the shelter of the trees watching that moving line of black dots as it worked round the hill. It seemed to crawl with intolerable slowness. Twice it disappeared from view behind patches of trees, and on both occasions it emerged again into view, but at length it turned round the further side of the hill and disappeared finally from view.

"Now!" said the Indian.

They moved forward across the plain diagonally, and presently struck a sled-trail, undoubtedly made by the team which they had watched crawl round the hill. They followed it steadily and in less than an hour were themselves moving up and alongside the same hill. As they travelled Musgrave noticed that they were advancing towards a pass, which as they reached the curve of the hill, began to close in on them. Here the snow was feathery and deep, and the Indian as he marked it, gave expression to his thought.

"Catch him!" he said. "He break the trail. We use it. Go faster than him. One hour—two hours, if the dark come not."

Musgrave agreed with him. The man in front, as he recognised, must be having a terribly laborious time in the deep feathery snow, whilst the Indian and himself following a packed trail could move twice as fast. It was indeed a matter almost of minutes, and the excitement of the chase gripped him. The first hour passed—they rounded a spur of rock which marked the summit of the pass, and as they did so, found a change in the trail. No longer was the snow light and feathery, but, packed by the wind blowing from the north, it was hard and firm as a road.

"Ah!" said the Indian. "Now he go quick."

They travelled faster themselves, racing for their quarry against the falling darkness. Not once in their descent from the pass did they catch sight of the team in front; but they followed the trail untiringly; and once again they caught the yelping of beaten dogs. Their own dogs gave tongue in answer, and though the Indian instantly silenced them, there could be little doubt that the man whom they pursued must hear them and take warning.

That he did so, they had proof three-quarters of an hour later, when in the dusk, following the trail of the sled ahead of them, they made the rather steep bank of a river. The trail led straight over the bank to the frozen surface, and, without pause, the Indian plunged downward.

Then came a crash and a cry of warning. Instantly Musgrave, clinging to the gee-pole of the sled, flung his weight on it and hung back to check it. But the momentum was too great. He was carried downward, and, as the sled swerved and was swung loose, the next moment he found himself struggling in icy water. A second later a strong hand gripped him and flung him clear on the ice, where he rolled amid a tangle of dogs. He picked himself up instantly, and became aware of the Indian's voice.

"We camp here, or we freeze. Ginger Bob he see us. He break ice for us to slip in. He travel on. Listen!"

Faintly through the stillness came the hum of sled-runners on clear ice. There was little question that the Indian's guess was the right one, and none whatever as to the course to be followed. Already Musgrave's wet garments were stiffening to ice, and the Indian's moccasins clanked like castanets, he having been saved from a full sousing by a piece

of ice from which he had leaped as the water surged over it. In the great cold there was but one thing to be done, if Musgrave was not to freeze bodily and if his companion was not to lose his feet. In great haste they made a fire and heaped dry wood upon it, and as it flamed and roared the Indian changed his socks and moccasins, whilst Musgrave broke away his outer garments and rolled up in a blanket crept into his companion's sleeping-bag; and as he lay there, well in the heat and radiance of the fire, he seemed to hear still the ringing hum of sled-runners far up the river.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAJOR'S PLAN

BY a camp-fire, situated on the bank of a river, Betty Marlowe sat watching the two men who had by force carried her from McGuire's stricken camp. There was a deep melancholy in her eyes, and on her face a look of care. She was quite free to move about the camp, but that very freedom, as she knew, was the surest sign of helplessness. Outside the circle of firelight was the darkness of the great woods, the menacing cold and the snowy wastes of the North, and these things as she was aware, were her true jailors. How far she was from McGuire she had no knowledge. All that she knew was that they had travelled through the whole day and that now the distance between the camp from which she had been stolen and the one where she now was, represented a long day's march. She was not even sure that she was by the same river; for as she had learned during the delay enforced by McGuire's sickness, the country was intersected by numerous waterways, all now in

the grip of winter ; and it might well be that Endicott and the man who claimed to be her father had turned aside from the particular river by which her little tent had been pitched. Indeed she was morally certain that they had, for the river on which she now looked out was much wider than the one where McGuire lay. To attempt to run away or to make her way back would be simply to lose herself in the wilderness.

Her thoughts went back to McGuire. One thing she knew which her captors were unaware of. The Irishman was almost convalescent. In a few days at the very most he would be able to follow her trail. There for the moment lay her solitary hope. Her thoughts took a wider range. Where was Neil ? Had he indeed joined the Mounted Police, and what would he think if he knew her situation at that moment ?

A step broke on her thoughts, and Maurice Endicott approached her, bringing food.

"I'm afraid it is a little rough, Betty ; but I have done my best."

She accepted the food in silence, and Endicott seated himself close by her. For a little time he watched her without speaking ; then as Major Andover moved outside the circle of the firelight, he said in a quick whisper :

"Betty !"

The girl's only reply was a little frown ; but he continued hurriedly. "You must listen to me. I have something to propose to you !"

"I do not want to listen."

"But you must ! I have a plan to take you away from the Major."

"But where will you take me ?" asked Betty with a glance round.

"To your mother."

"To my—my——"

She made as if to rise to her feet, but Endicott hastily intervened. "Sit still, Betty," he said. "Continue eating. Try and look as if you had heard nothing to surprise you. I do not want your father to think I am telling you what he does not mean you to know."

"But my mother?" She is dead! She died when I was a child."

"No, she is alive! I have seen her. She is up here—as a nun working among the native orphans. She has been here twenty years. There was trouble between the Major and her. What the trouble was I do not know, but it must have been very grave, for it was given out that she was dead, and your father was told that you were dead also."

"But why——"

"Well, I suppose that as Andover was not a model husband it was not expected that he would prove a model father, and so——"

"You helped to put me in his care!" broke in Betty with bitterness.

"No! You wrong me there! I had nothing to do with kidnapping you. That was your father's design, and I could not hinder him, but all day the plan I am proposing has been in my mind."

"You have seen my mother, you said?"

"Yes. She is looking for you. She heard from Père Molineau that you were up here, and she is very anxious for your welfare. Your father and she met. I saw the meeting. It was terrible beyond words; and your mother was consumed with anxiety lest your father should influence your life. She even went so far as to threaten to have him killed if he interfered with you, so you can guess how deeply she felt about the matter."

Betty did not immediately reply. She was a

little overcome by the news which she had heard, and her brain was in a whirl groping among startling facts, that however incredible they might sound, as she was convinced, were still facts. Endicott waited, and then as she did not speak continued : " You must think it over, Betty. I am your friend. I love you, and I will take you to your mother. Your father will hate me for doing so, and it is on the cards that he may try to do me grave injury ; but for your sake I will risk——Hss-s-h ! Try and eat ! Play with your food ; at least make a pretence. Above all reveal nothing of what I have told you."

Endicott rose, as Major Andover came again into the circle of the firelight. As he walked away from Betty his face assumed a look of dejection, which the Major noted ; and at which he smiled a little. He imagined that his companion had suffered a snub at Betty's hands, and he was a little amused at the thought that Endicott should attempt to ingratiate himself with the girl in the present circumstances. He made no remark upon the matter, however, but seated himself by the fire, lit a pipe and furtively watched his daughter through half-closed eyes.

She was, he owned to himself, rarely beautiful ; very like what her mother had been when he had first met her ; but there was a firmness about her chin that betokened will-power ; and that boded ill for his half-formed plans. She was no meek and mild miss to be twisted this way or that, and the problem before him required careful consideration.

Until Endicott had revealed the fact he had not known that his daughter lived ; though he had entertained a momentary suspicion when he had seen her with her aunt in London, and, as Mrs. Cathcart had suspected, his call on her friend had been for the purpose of verifying or disproving the

idea that had occurred to him. But the information she had given to him, in all good faith, had misled him, and had put the idea out of his mind, so that when he had started for Canada, he had been under the belief that only Neil Musgrave stood between him and the money which he sought. Betty was a totally unexpected obstacle, and, as he owned, not an easy one to overcome. He wondered if his father when he had made his will had possessed proof of her existence, the fact of which had been so carefully concealed from himself? It seemed scarcely likely. Probably the old man had remembered that he had a granddaughter, and had assumed she lived; but if his knowledge had been more precise, it was certain that the executors and trustees would share it. In that case, he was, as he phrased it to himself, up a very tall tree, unless——

Dimly he saw a way. Apparently Betty's mother above all things else desired that the girl should have no association with himself. It might be possible to drive a bargain; and to allow his daughter to purchase immunity from himself by renouncing her rights under the will. It was certain that Margot would urge that course on Betty, and then there would remain only Musgrave——

His brow darkened as he thought of the trooper policeman. He hoped that Ginger Bob had after all succeeded in the purpose which had been thwarted by that unknown person in the wood. The remembrance of that individual was disquieting. Had the unknown one been with the policeman, keeping watch whilst the other entered the camp? It was a strange coincidence if such had not been the case, and if in the vast solitude of the North, the two had independently arrived at the camp at the same time. Musgrave now represented a problem for which there was no immediate solution. He did not know

whether he was alive or dead, and if Ginger Bob had perished, as seemed most likely, it would be some time before he could learn the facts of the situation. Anyway it was no use worrying over the matter, for the present. He would deal with one thing at a time ; and the immediate problem was his daughter. He must find the Mission to which Margot was attached and when the bargain that he contemplated was made, he could deal with Musgrave if the necessity for doing so still existed.

He remained by the fire, thinking and smoking, long after his companions had retired, and as he sat there, through the stillness of the night, there came a sound which brought him to his feet—the crisp ring of sled-runners on ice. Judging by the sound the sled was still some distance away ; but it brought with it a great unrestfulness to Major Andover. Who could it be who was travelling through the night ? Ginger Bob ? The whisky-runner had no team, unless by some chance he had acquired one ; a contingency which was altogether improbable. Musgrave—on the trail of the party with which he had found Ginger Bob ? Or possibly the Indian who had been with McGuire and who was about to attempt a rescue ? Of these alternatives the last seemed the most probable, and feeling himself quite able to deal with any Indian, the Major, conscious of relief, began to walk up and down in the shadow of the trees bordering the camp.

Half an hour passed, then out of the darkness down river emerged shadowy forms silhouetted against the snow on the bank. Andover halted in the shelter of a grand spruce, and saw the traveller approach the camp. A little distance away, he halted the dogs, and crept forward to investigate. His movements were cautious and furtive and Andover loosened his mitten that he might slip his

hand the more readily to his pistol holster. From his hiding-place he saw the new-comer look carefully at the recumbent forms in the sleeping-bags; and then moved towards the sled. Was the man a mere thief bent on plunder? Scarcely had the question shot into the Major's mind, when the man's face clearly seen in the firelight brought recognition.

"Why, Ginger——"

Ginger Bob, for he it was, jumped with surprise, then he gave a laugh of relief.

"You! Colonel! Well, here's everlastin' luck!"

"Where have you come from? How did you get that team? What happened to Musgrave?"

"All in good time, Colonel. Jest now I happen ter be famishin'. Guess I'll call up that same team, an' feed both ther team an' myself, then we'll talk. I've things ter tell yer, sure."

Going back he brought the dogs into camp, fed them, prepared himself a meal and ate it, quite without regard to Andover's manifest impatience. Then he lit a pipe, and with a grin looked at the Major.

"Now we kin talk. An' first question ter me. Yer didn't foller ther line due west as I told yer to?"

"No! We got lost in the storm."

Ginger Bob nodded. The explanation was quite simple and he accepted it. "I kin understand that; but once or twice I had doubts—horrid doubts, Colonel. I suspicioned 'twas an accident; but all ther same 'twas an accident that would have meant by-by for me, ef I hadn't had ther luck ter pick up that thar dog-team!"

"Where did you get it?"

"It's that blighted Mounter's. You see when he made for me in ther wood, I guessed he'd left his team somewheres about. An' as he'd come down

that glade I went up et, an' found ther team right enough. So I made off with et, meanin' ter cut inter ther trail yer would be followin' ahead of yer."

"Then Musgrave——"

"No such luck!" broke in the whisky-runner, anticipating the Major's thought. "That feller has ther luck of ther deuce. Yer forgettin' ther man who was in ther wood. Or maybe yer didn't know about him?"

For the moment, Major Andover had forgotten. "As you say, I was forgetting. Who was he? What was he doing there?"

"He was an Indian, an' he was watchin' ther camp, I should say. Anyway when I sighted fer that blessed Mounter, he rose up by my side like a ghost, an' spoilt my aim. Then he gripped me, an' when I threw him off an' started to run, he ske-daddled in ther other direction, an' Musgrave, by mistake follered him instead of me. Then I raced for Musgrave's team, as I told yer, an' beat et jest as fast as ther dogs could travel. But Musgrave must have come up with thet Indian, for they're on my trail, though I have hindered 'em some to-night."

"How?" asked the Major.

"Well, they was pressin' et; an' I guessed I was ter get no rest unless I arranged for one for them first. So I arranged et. Ef it hadn't been that I dropped my gun in ther wood, I'd have waited somewhere an' potted them, but as et was I broke ther ice at ther place whar they'd strike ther river——"

"Then they may be drowned?" cried the Major excitedly.

Ginger Bob shook his head. "No, Colonel, I don't buoy myself up with no false hopes of that sort. Yer see thar was two of them. An' thoug

et's a moral certainty that one of them would take ther plunge, an' maybe ther dogs, t'other one would lift him out. But they'd hev' to camp, then an' thar. That's what I kalkilated on, an' I made no mistake. I hev'n't seen or heard them since, an' I guess I've a-got ther start I wanted. They hev three dogs ter my four—an' perlice dogs is allus tip-top. So I guess I'll make it all right."

"But they will follow your trail?"

"I'm not sayin' they won't. That's ter be hoped for, an' when we git ter ther right place—why we kin give 'em their pass-out checks. See, Colonel?"

A look of comprehension came on the Major's face. There were items in the whisky-runner's story that had troubled him as he had listened; but now he saw the solution of the problem which he had been considering earlier in the night. As Ginger Bob had hinted, it would be easy to arrange an ambushade, and—— His eyes wandered to the sleeping-bag where his daughter lay. Betty would be a difficulty. It would be necessary to avoid her having any knowledge of Musgrave's presence in the neighbourhood; and it might be vitally important that she should have no suspicion of what was to happen. A thoughtful frown gathered on his face, and then Ginger Bob spoke again.

"Got company, ain't yer, Colonel?" he asked, with a nod in the direction of the two sleeping-bags.

"Yes! my daughter!"

"Phew!" Ginger Bob whistled his surprise, then he gave vent to a startled exclamation.

"What is it?" said Andover.

"That durned Indian! I've a worried over him a goodish bit. Now I guess I know who he is!"

"Indeed! Who is he?"

"Well, Colonel, yer remember what that spit-fire at their cabin threatened! I guess that thar Indian

who was in ther wood watchin' our camp is her man. I guess he's trillin' yer; an' ef he finds yer've got ther girl——"

The whisky-runner broke off without finishing the sentence, and Major Andover nodded. He had not the slightest doubt that the other was right in his conjecture, and he was shaken by a spasm of rage. Then he laughed savagely, as a plan came to him which solved the difficulty occasioned by Betty's presence, which he had been considering when the other had asked about her.

"He won't find out, Ginger," he said. "We'll send the girl a march ahead with Maurice. I don't want her to know what we have in contemplation; and if we start them an hour earlier in the morning we shall be between them and Musgrave all the time. See? And then when the psychological moment arrives——"

"Guess that'll do, Colonel," answered Ginger Bob with a nod.

"Then I'll waken Endicott and put him wise." He went to Endicott and wakened him. The younger man sat up in his sleeping-bag, and looked his surprise as his eyes fell on Ginger Bob. Andover rapidly gave him a résumé of the whisky-runner's adventure and then unfolded the plan for the morning. He listened with quickening heart. The plan jumped so with his own secret designs that he could have shouted with pleasure. But he listened without giving any sign of acquiescence, and so impassive was he that the Major fell to persuasion.

"It'll give you your chance, Maurice. You see, you will be alone with Betty——"

"But Betty is not exactly amiable just now," interrupted Endicott with a show of reluctance.

The Major laughed. "She'll get over that, my boy. She'll be driven to you for company. The

silence of the wilderness will break down her reserve. Before a day is through she will be in a melting mood, you may wager."

"Well, if you really wish it——"

"I do! That is settled. Ginger Bob here will work out an itinerary for you to follow; and you will start ahead with Betty in the morning. It is the best way of avoiding difficulties."

Thus it fell, that whilst it was yet dark, Endicott and Betty left the camp, on the journey up-river. The young man had made an opportunity of speaking privately to Betty, and had pointed out that here was the chance to accomplish the purpose that he had half-unfolded on the previous night. Convinced of his sincerity, she made no demur, and as the pair, taking with them Andover's own team, drew out of the camp, the Major smiled cynically to himself. Then he stared with inscrutable eyes down the river in the direction from which Musgrave might be expected.

CHAPTER XVI

MUSGRAVE HEARS NEWS

IT was morning, but not yet light; and none the worse for his immersion of the night before, Neil Musgrave sat listening to his Indian companion, and considering a rough map which he had drawn in the snow.

"It is so. The river up there"—the Indian jerked his head in a northerly direction—"turns thus." He indicated a line in the snow, and then continued. "Here a stream joins it; a little river that runs from a lake, so. The end of the lake is by hills. The hills reach to the sky, but there is a way through that is known to me. We go this

way, across the lake, through the hills, to here." He indicated a point on the map, a point that was on the river where they were camped. "We take this way, we get here one, two days in front of man going the way of the main trail. You see?"

"Yes, I see," answered Musgrave quickly. "But you are assuming that Ginger Bob will follow the main trail, and we do not know where he is going, Ligoun. He may take the cut-off——"

"That we shall see. He leave a trail. If he goes that way, we follow."

"But he may leave the river. He may strike across country!"

The Indian shook his head. "No. If he leave the river that way, he will come to the Great Barrens, where no man go. If he go the other way, there be the hills and after the hills the woods, much hard to travel. This man hurries. He will keep the river-trail. We make the cut-off, and we for him wait, or we travel to meet him. His eye will be watching down-stream. We shall come from above. It is good plan?"

Musgrave considered. There was much in what the Indian said, and a stern chase as he knew already was a long one. Further, the team, which the whisky-runner had robbed him of, was a stronger and altogether superior team to the Indian's, with one dog more. And Ginger Bob was now warned. He would push the dogs to the utmost, and if he knew the country well, in the network of waterways it was very possible that he might escape. He looked at the Indian's plan again, and a thought struck him.

"Tell me," he said, "is there any other river besides the one from the lake, that falls into this river, between here and there?"

He indicated the point at which they would rejoin

the main river after crossing the hills, and the Indian shook his head.

"Here there are the great hills. The river wind round them thus. From the hills small streams run, but a sled could not them follow. They lead nowhere but to the heights. A man would go up; he would come down again. You see?"

"Yes," answered Musgrave, "I see. I will take your leading, Ligoun. We will follow the river that leads to the lake, and will then go through the hills. And we will start at once."

While it was yet dark they commenced their journey, but day had long broken when they arrived at junction with the smaller river which they proposed to follow. Here the snow lay thick, and was broken by a single sled-trail, which the Indian carefully examined.

"Two men come down with heavy sled," he announced. "Turn here. Go up there."

He indicated the heavy trail which they were leaving and Musgrave nodded. "That is as plain as print, Ligoun. The question is, who were the two men?"

"Not tell that!" said the Indian gravely.

"No; but one could make a guess. There were two men in the camp with Ginger Bob, the two men whom you were following. I should say they are the people who made that trail."

"That may be," answered the Indian thoughtfully. "Without Ginger Bob they lose their way. Climb over the hills and come this way. Yes! And they go up-river, the same way that Ginger Bob go. We go this way, meet them later."

They turned up the smaller river, and as they hurried on, Musgrave's mind exercised itself with the question of the presence of Andover and Endicott in the North. Why they should be there,

seeking him, as Betty's letter had hinted, puzzled him greatly. He could think of no reason for the Major's attitude—which on the occasion of their last meeting had been plainly inimical. That Endicott resented Betty's interest in him he could understand; but even that resentment ought not to have allowed him to stand by whilst Ginger Bob attempted his life. That Andover and Endicott had anticipated the attack he was sure. There had been an air of expectancy about them, a certain tenseness in their attitude that, in the light of after events, became very significant. He was a little perplexed by the fact that the attack had not been pressed; but he found what happened to be the true explanation of it, in the unexpected presence of Ligoun in the wood. That undoubtedly had saved him. His heart burned at the thought of the treachery of the men whom he had known, and to himself he vowed that he would force Ginger Bob to own to their complicity once he was in his hands.

Without intermission they travelled steadily until midday, then the Indian who was leading suddenly halted the dogs and pointed ahead. Musgrave looked in the direction indicated, and saw a small camp, with a stripped pole, which hung the warning flag of red. A large fire burned in front of the canvas tent which proclaimed it to be a white man's camp, and by the fire a man was busy preparing a meal. Looking up from his labours, he caught sight of them, and hurried into the tent.

"We go by. Not stop!" said Ligoun, in evident fear.

"But——" Musgrave began, and broke off. He knew the meaning of that flag, and he was under no illusion as to the risk which a halt would involve. But it was his duty to investigate; to do what he

could for any sick man in this solitary land, and in a moment he had made up his mind.

"I must stop, Ligoun, and make an inquiry. It is the way of the police, you understand. We will drive past the camp, then from the way of the wind I will talk."

The Indian made no demur, though he was deadly afraid of La Mort Rouge! The ways of white men were inexplicable to him; but if it was the duty of the police to talk with men smitten with the terror, he had nothing to say. Deflecting the course of the dogs so that they would pass the camp at the greatest distance the river made possible, he drove onward. As he did so the man who had disappeared in the tent emerged again, signalling for them to stop, and as they drew level with the tent, a voice roared out to greet them.

"Ahoy! there! For the Lord's sake, shtop!"

As Musgrave caught the tones of it, he halted in his tracks.

"Pat McGuire," he cried, "is that you?"

"Shure ut is me, or fwat's left av me. An' who may ye be?"

"Musgrave, Neil Musgrave!"

"Neil! 'Tis a blessed miracle!" roared McGuire's voice. "Bhoy, I must talk with ye, but don't ye come too near. There's no call for ye to run into a danger that I'm lavin'."

Musgrave went nearer, and then asked: "You have the sickness, Pat."

"Yes; but praise the Lord, I'm nearly through with ut. Two or three days an' I'll be movin', thanks to that girl av yours!"

Neil started. "What do you mean, Pat? Is Betty——"

"She was here, the darlin', but she's gone. Carried off by that father av hers."

"Father! But Betty has no father."

"That's where ye're mistook. She has a father or what claims to be sich. I've sayne him with me own blessed eyes; though not whin he was here th' other day. His name's Andover——"

"Andover? Major Andover?"

"The same scut! An' with him is that man whose pictcher was in the paper, Endicott, who wants to marry the girl, or I'm a——"

"But, Pat, I don't understand. Andover and Endicott are up here I know, for I have seen them——"

"Sayne thim, hav' ye, bhoy? An' ye are yit alive? 'Tis the hand av Providence, for thim two men are afther ye for no good. But fw hy do I waste time in talking. Howld quiet, bhoy; an' I'll tell ye the thing from start to finish. 'Tis the quickest way, an' there's rale need for hurry."

The policeman stood there stamping his feet to keep them from freezing, whilst McGuire gave him a brief account of all that had happened since his meeting with Betty at Edmonton until the day before, since when Betty had been missing.

"The Indian found she'd gone whin he woke in the mornin'. Ut's that Major Andover av hers. He tried to make her l'ave me, an' she would not—she would not, the jewel! He must hav' tuk her away in the dark, tied her in her shlaping-bag an' carried her off on the sled. The Indian could read the signs, an' he tracked the sled down the river to where they turned north up the river fw hat this runs into by all accounts. As soon as I can stir I'm manin' to follow thim, for I'm dead shure the darlin' nivver wint away av her own choice. But now ye've come, 'tis for ye to follow, bhoy. Ye'll hav to hit the trail hard; for they've a day an' a half clear start av ye, but ye must do it, bhoy; ye

must, for that girl thinks the world av ye, an' she's been trailin' up here for wakes an' wakes, hopin' to get a word av ye. She was afeared av the intintions av this Andover towards ye, as I was myself afther he came with Ginger Bob up to Cedar Forks to make inquiries about ye; but now 'twill be all right, an' ye'll save the darlin' as she would have saved ye."

"You can depend on me, Pat."

"Shure, an' don't I know ut? But before ye start till me one thing, bhoy. Are ye in the Mounted P'leece?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"I didn't know! But Father Molineau up at the Mission suspicioned it—an' whin it was mentioned I knew he was right—knew it in the soul av me! But, glory be! 'tis a fine thing for now. Ye're the law an' the gospel in yeer own person, an' ye'll be able to talk with thim abductors with authority. So push on, bhoy; an' rimimber I'll be at the heels av ye as soon as I can travel. But mind one thing. 'Ware Indian camps an' strange cabins. The pestilence is abroad, an' if ye was to git it—watch out! Watch out, bhoy!"

"I'll watch," answered Musgrave.

"Thin so long to ye, Neil."

"But are you sure you're all right, Pat?"

"As near well as can be; an' now as I'll be aisy in me mind, I'll be as lively as a lynx in a day or two. Git along, bhoy, an' don't worry about me. Afther the girl wid ye!"

It seemed the only thing to do, and after shouting his farewells Musgrave moved to where the Indian awaited him. His mind was in a whirl. The news that he had heard was almost too amazing for belief. Betty—Major Andover's daughter! It was incredible as it was also incredible that she should

have been carried away against her will. And yet Pat had talked quite sanely, and he was in deadly earnest about her rescue. When he reached the Indian he was moved to confer with him.

"Ligoun," he said, "there was a girl here, whom those men whom you follow have taken away with them."

As he spoke the Indian started, and a flash came in his dark eyes.

"The girl's name?"

"Betty Marlowe!" answered Musgrave, wondering at the look which had come into the Indian's eyes.

"It is the same," answered Ligoun simply. "For that girl I watch. Sister Margot send her a message. And those bad men, they die. I keel them."

There was something ferocious in the Indian's demeanour that startled Musgrave, then he spoke sharply. "No nonsense of that sort, Ligoun. Remember I am one of the Riders. The law shall deal with them. But we must find them soon. They went down this trail to the main river and turned northward. That sled-trail we saw was theirs. They left here yester-morning, early."

"Ginger Bob, he go to them!"

"That is likely. But I want to know something. Do you still think it is better to go through the hills or to follow the straight trail?"

"Go through the hills. We meet them."

"Then march on, and travel your fastest; for if we miss them we shall be beyond forgiveness."

"Moosh! Moosh!" cried the Indian and cracked his whip, and with his hand on the gee-pole, and his head bent in thought, Neil Musgrave moved forward on the double trail of duty and love.

About the same time, Maurice Endicott, moving up the other river with Betty Marlowe, ahead of

the Major and Ginger Bob, halted the dogs and made a fire to boil water for coffee. The girl stood by and watched him in silence, and under her gaze, Endicott felt very uncomfortable. Since the march had begun there had been little opportunity for conversation, for they followed an unbroken trail ; which necessitated one of them marching ahead of the dogs, whilst the other at the gee-pole guided the sled. But now the opportunity offered, and in an endeavour to break down the passive hostility the girl manifested towards him and so to establish more friendly relations, he broke the irksome silence.

"A penny for your thoughts, Betty?" he said with a lightness that he was far from feeling.

"You may have them for nothing," answered the girl with a quiet deliberateness. "I was wondering why you and—a—Major Andover came to Canada to look for Neil Musgrave?"

Endicott was startled and secretly appalled by the question. It was the very last thing he had expected ; but he bore himself well under the surprise. "You are making a mistake," he answered readily. "Major Andover and I came up here after the moose and the bear, and not at all after Neil Musgrave."

"But," answered Betty, "you went with a man called Ginger Bob to Cedar Forks to find him?"

"I suppose that man McGuire told you that?"

"He did ; and he also told me that the man Ginger Bob is no friend of Neil's ; that in fact he is a very dangerous enemy of his."

"Possibly," answered Endicott smoothly. "I do not know. The simple truth is that knowing Musgrave was in the country, and hearing that he was at Cedar Forks, we made our way there with the intention of looking him up in a friendly way.

As for Ginger Bob—well, one cannot be expected to know all about the guides whom one engages—particularly in a country like this.”

“Then you had no other purpose in looking up Neil?”

The question was asked in a careless manner, but Endicott was a little shaken by it. To cover the tremors of which he was conscious, he laughed noisily. “My dear Betty,” he cried, “what other reason could I possibly have?”

“I do not know,” answered Betty quietly. “But I have wondered, since I—I heard you that had sought him.”

“After all,” he said again, and this time there was a confident ring in his voice, “it was only natural that one should do so, when one was in the neighbourhood.”

“Tell me one thing,” said the girl suddenly. “Have you seen Neil since you came to Canada?”

Again Endicott was unprepared for the question. For a very brief time he visibly hesitated, then answered sharply, “No!”

Betty did not believe him, though she did not say so. She was quite sure that Neil and he had met; and there was a little fear in her heart as to the issue of that meeting. She stood there drinking her coffee, a look of anxious thought on her face, and to save himself from further troublesome questions Endicott gave the conversation a new turn.

“You are very like your mother as you stand there,” he said.

“Is that so?” said the girl with a quick change of interest.

“Yes; if she were not sad-looking she still would be a woman of extreme beauty. But you will see her for yourself before long.”

“You really mean to take me to her?”

"At all costs!" he answered.

"How far is it to this mission where she lives?"

"Two hundred miles as near as I can tell, possibly a little more."

"And do we keep straight up this river?"

"No. When we have travelled for two days according to the map, we take a cut through the hills to the other side of the watershed; the Mission being on a river flowing eastward and emptying in the Mackenzie."

"It is a long journey."

"Seven or eight days!" answered Endicott carelessly.

"And when do you propose to draw away from a—your friends?"

"A little to-night, and more to-morrow. We shall camp a little beyond the place agreed on; and if they don't overtake us to-night, we shall have so much better start to-morrow. They may be delayed——"

"But what is to delay them?" asked Betty.

"Oh, they are waiting for another man," answered Endicott quickly, "and of course when a man is travelling in this country he can't expect to arrive on any scheduled time. But we had better be moving again, I think."

They turned to the trail again, and travelled fast till darkness fell, and for an hour afterwards. Then they made camp, and after the evening meal the girl to avoid conversation, on the plea that she was very weary, retired to her sleeping-bag. Endicott sat by the fire smoking and thinking. He knew that Betty's plea of weariness was but an excuse; that for the present he was unacceptable to her, and only tolerated because of the service he could render her. But he counted on that service altering her attitude towards him. Seven or eight days in the

wilderness in intimate companionship was bound to make a difference. The girl was sore at her abduction, but that would wear off ; her mind was still absorbed with Musgrave, but after to-night or to-morrow at latest Musgrave would cease to be a factor in the situation ; though it might take Betty a little time to realise that such was the case. And then there was the silence, the darkness, the vast solitude of the North. He looked at the snowy surface of the river fading away in the darkness ; the blackness of the pinewoods, which seemed to have crept closer with the dying down of the fire, the cold light of the stars overhead ; and then he shivered. He himself felt afraid of the silent menace of Nature ; of that darkness that seems to hide inscrutable enmities ; and what must it be for Betty ? He was glad of her silent company, there in her sleeping-bag. It helped to check the terror of the night and of the brooding wild only to know that she was there, a human presence close at hand ; and before long, before they were through those gaunt hills, whose snowy crests they could see in the daytime, Betty would be feeling the same way, and would be as glad of his presence as he was of hers. Then his moment would come ; when, shrinking from that intangible menace of the wild, the girl would turn to him for relief and help.

Seven or eight days he had said to her, but in reality the time would depend upon the march of events. The moment, which he was assured would come—the moment when Betty, smitten by the terror of the silent, unpeopled world, would turn clingingly to him, should set a term to their wanderings. Till then she should not meet that white-faced woman who had come to Ginger Bob's cabin. It would be so easy to pretend to lose oneself in this snowy vastness ; and the very despair which the

belief that they were lost would engender, would help to drive the girl to his arms. Alone in that wide white world, with nowhere any sign of life except the funereal pines, with the silent terror of the North clutching at the heart, it could not fall out other than he dreamed; and he rejoiced at the chance Fate had ironically planned for him.

CHAPTER XVII

GINGER BOB'S FLIGHT

AS Ginger Bob halted his stolen dogs, in the gathering dusk, he looked first up and then down the trail.

"Guess we got ter make a lonely camp, Colonel. Your friend Mr. Maurice hev burned the snow under him ter-day, an' that durned policeman don't seem ter be in no partickler hurry."

"No! Perhaps your little scheme worked better than you expected, Ginger."

The whisky-runner shook his head. "Don't yer bank on that, Colonel. 'Tain't in ther least likely thet both of them were drowned. I hadn't time ter break enough ice for that. Maybe the team went through, in which case they'd be some-thin' worse than delayed; but that's ther best we can hope for."

"You mean they would be stranded."

"Jest that, Colonel."

"And to be stranded in this country, with no outfit, and with no one in the neighbourhood to help, means the end."

"Somethin' very like it," agreed Ginger. "That was what I worked for when I lifted this team, an' et didn't come off. 'Twould be queer ef it came off now, when I worked jest for ter delay them."

"It would certainly be interesting," said the Major, "though it would have one drawback."

"Thet so? What are yer thinking of, Colonel?"

"Well, we should never be quite sure whether Musgrave would turn up or not."

"Yep," agreed the whisky-runner. "That is so. Guess it would hev been as well ter stop where we was till we found out. But I tell yer what, Colonel, ef that durned Mounter don't heave in sight ter-morrer we'll ketch up ter yer friend, Mr. Maurice, tell him ter camp, an' then jest hev a run down river ter find about ther Mounter. Thet way we'll do away with ther uncertainty."

"I think that would be wise," agreed the Major, and having reached that decision, they began to prepare camp.

An hour later Ginger Bob glanced at his companion, who with food before him was not eating.

"Yer seem a little off yer corn, Colonel."

"Yes," answered Andover. "I have no appetite."

"Missing ther variety menoos of ther Astoria, I guess," laughed Ginger.

"No, that is not it," answered the other. "I have a seedy sort of feeling."

"Yer hev, hev yer, Colonel?"

There was now no hint of laughter in Ginger's voice, and in his face as he glanced at the Major there was a sharp, questioning look.

"Yes! I don't think I ever felt quite like it before." Ginger Bob was more interested still.

"What are ther symptoms like, Colonel?"

"Well, I have a cold shivery sort of feeling," answered Andover.

"Then git about a pint of coffee in yer, Colonel, whilst et's steamin'. That'll put yer right." The Major took the advice, but still did not eat; and an hour after he was in a high fever, and complaining

of violent pains in the back. The whisky-runner considered him carefully, and presently without ostentation put the width of the fire between himself and his companion.

"Tell yer what, Colonel, yer lookin' bad, ef I were you I should git inter that sleepin'-bag of yers."

"I think it would be as well," acknowledged the Major, and a little time after did so.

Ginger Bob made no preparations for retiring himself. Instead he built a huge fire, and charging his pipe, sat smoking. His brutal face wore an anxious look. Again and again he glanced towards the place where Andover lay with an odd light of fear in his eyes. Presently from the sleeping-bag came the sound of a voice, speaking in broken, disconnected sentences, and the whisky-runner nodded to himself.

"Ramblin'," he muttered. "Sounds bad, looks bad, an' es bad!"

His vigil lasted for an hour, two hours, then he rose, and quickly making his way to the sled, began to go through the stores. A small mixed assortment he set on one side, the rest he packed on the sled again, and carefully lashed them in place. Then he took the Major's rifle and thrust that under the lashings, and that done, himself dragged the sled a little way from the camp. After that one by one he found the dogs, and dragging them to the sled harnessed them in their places. He looked back at the camp. He was not a humane man and the instinct of self-preservation was strong within him, but even he felt the dastardliness of the thing he was about to do. Moved by some touch of compunction, he went back to the fire, and rummaging in his furs, produced a pocket-book and a pencil, and proceeded to write a note. Tearing out the page he had written on, he half-split a small

bough, and inserted the note in the split, sticking the bough upright in the snow close by the provisions which he had taken from the sled. Then he looked towards the sleeping-bag again.

"So long, Colonel," he whispered. "Sorry I ain't built for a bloomin' hero; an' yer bin ter close ter small-pox fer my likin'. Them symptoms of yern ain't good. Ef yer only knew et—they're very bad. An' I can't take risks. Nope! So I quits. By-by!"

He left the camp and, going back to the team, moved off in the darkness, up-river. The dogs were tired, and he himself was tired, so that they made no great pace; but he travelled for three hours before he made a fresh camp, where he slept the untroubled sleep of a man who had long rid himself of the burden of a conscience.

He was a little late next morning, and the day had broken when he set about preparations for breakfast, over which he hurried more than usual. Constantly during the preparations and whilst he ate, he turned his eyes down-stream, for though, having possession of the rifle, he was not afraid of the Colonel, he was deadly afraid of that to which, as he believed, his late companion had fallen victim and was averse to making any closer acquaintance with it. The Colonel might have the strength to follow him, in which case—— As he considered the contingency he gave an almost involuntary glance at the rifle, thus betraying the means by which he would seek protection for himself in case of need.

Breakfast passed without incident, and soon after he was breaking trail again. He marched till noon, and was hesitating whether to make a midday rest or to push on a little while longer and make an early camp for the night, when his attention was attracted by a dark patch on the bank of the river furthest

from him. He looked at it curiously for a moment, then he said aloud: "Somebody's camped jest here, lately. Guess I'll hev a look. Maybe Maurice an' that girl——"

Without finishing the sentence, he moved towards the dark patch, and, as he had surmised, found that it represented the ashes of a camp-fire, which from its condition had been extinguished by falling snow. A curious drift on the farther side of the fire caught his attention, and accustomed though he was to the strange freaks that the wind plays with snow, he stood staring at it. It looked very like a man seated in a huddled position, and after a moment he crossed to it and pushed at the drift with his foot. It yielded, the centre of it toppling sideways, and as it did so he was startled to find the impression confirmed. Under the outer casing of snow was a dead man. He gave one look at the frozen face, then an oath of surprise ripped from him.

"Bill!"

It was indeed his partner in the whisky-running business, the man who had left the cabin with Musgrave at his heels and who, by some unexplained means, had come to this end in the snow. Ginger Bob gazed at the still face incredulously—then he looked round for the dead man's sled. It was nowhere about. He poked in the snow, and found only a pair of snow-shoes of the Cree pattern which Bill affected. Bill's rifle was not there; nor his axe nor blankets, or if they were, Ginger Bob could not find them. He looked from the snow-shoes to the dead man who had owned them, and from the man to the ashes of the fire by which he had crouched to die, then he gave an expression to the idea in his mind.

"Dogs stampeded, or went through rotten ice. Poor ole Bill!"

That seemed the likeliest explanation ; and after considering it a little, he nodded his head as if to confirm it. Then he shivered a little, and after shovelling snow over the dead man's face with one of the snow-shoes he turned away. He made no other attempt to find a grave for his late partner. The ground was frozen too hard and deep to dig a grave ; and he had no spare blanket in which he might have wrapped the dead man in order to give him the tree-burial practised by the Northern Indians. The snow which was his winding-sheet must be his grave. Without further delay he called to the dogs, and cracking his whip, hurried away. All thought of halting in the immediate neighbourhood was banished. He travelled on until it was almost dark, and when he pitched camp the fire that he built was larger than usual. He was conscious of a little catch of fear at his heart and was more acutely conscious of the darkness and silence than he had ever been before ; and at the same time had a sense of loneliness to which hitherto he had been a stranger. And the fire was cheerful. It drove the darkness back. Its pleasant crackling and hissing spurts broke the deadly silence.

But it was also his undoing. For, as it happened, Musgrave and the Indian, having accomplished their journey through the hills, caught the glare of it two miles away, and whilst Ligoun pitched camp, the policeman set out to investigate. He approached the neighbourhood of the fire cautiously, keeping well in the shadow of the woods along the banks, and when about two hundred yards away stopped to reconnoitre. All that he could see was the figure of a man crouching by the fire, who once or twice looked back over his shoulder towards the woods behind, as if something there disturbed him.

He crept nearer, on his guard for the moment

when the man's dogs should give warning, but the warning was not given ; for the reason that the tired dogs having been fed were curled up in the holes which they had dug in the snow, and were sound asleep. After a little manœuvring he found himself within a dozen yards of the man by the fire. But the man had his back to him, and before he stepped into the open he desired to see the man's face. Looking about him, close to his hand he found a bush with dead twigs and deliberately snapped one of the twigs. In the intense stillness the noise it made for so small a thing was preposterous, and the effect on the man by the fire was positively startling. The man leaped to his feet with a cry, then stood there, his teeth chattering, his eyes glued on the wood as if he saw visions. But now the light from the fire illumined the man's face, and Musgrave's heart leaped as he recognised him. Silently he unbuttoned his pistol holster, and with the pistol held in one hand, with the other he snapped a second twig. Ginger Bob made no move to investigate. He did not even move towards his rifle which was lying on the sled. He simply stared into the shadows of the wood with fear-stricken eyes ; and to Musgrave's ears came the hoarse, tense whisper :

"What is et ?"

The policeman was amazed. Knowing nothing of the mental depression of the whisky-runner or of his undefined fear, he was astonished at the effect produced by the really slight sounds of snapping twigs. But he did not delay to take advantage of it.

"Put up your hands, Ginger !" he commanded.

The whisky-runner dropped an oath that expressed relief from tension, but he put up his hands.

"Now move away from that sled to the other side of the fire."

Ginger obeyed mechanically, and Musgrave advanced into the circle of firelight. As he saw who his captor was, the whisky-runner swore again, and the trooper addressed him.

"You've a belt there with a knife and a pistol, I see. When I give the word you can drop your hands, unfasten the belt and throw it to me. But remember, no hanky-panky tricks. You've fired on me once, and if you make the slightest move other than according to orders, I shall shoot. . . . Now—the belt."

Ginger had not the slightest doubt that Musgrave would do what he threatened, and he took no risks. Dropping his hands, he unfastened the belt, and flung it across the fire. It fell in the snow at the policeman's feet. Stooping quickly, Musgrave recovered it, then moving sideways to the sled, he secured possession of the rifle. After that he addressed his prisoner again.

"Now you shall change camp, Ginger. Just rout out the dogs and harness them to the sled, and remember what I said. No tricks or——"

A little significant movement of the pistol in his hand completed the sentence more perfectly than words, and realising that the other was master of the situation, the whisky-runner obeyed him to the letter. When the dogs stood harnessed in the traces Musgrave spoke again.

"Now go in front and break trail. Straight up-river. I'll tell you when to halt. You needn't hurry, if you're tired. Moosh! Moosh!"

Clinging to the gee-pole with one hand, and holding his pistol with the other, Musgrave followed whilst Ginger Bob broke trail; and after a little over half an hour's march they arrived at the former's camp, where Ligoun had just finished preparing the evening meal. Musgrave ordered his prisoner to sit down

where he could keep him in view, and ate the fried moose-steak and bacon with the greater relish because the task on which he had set out from the post was half-accomplished. Then when his pipe was lit he looked at Ginger.

"Tell me, why did you shoot at me the other night?"

"Becos I owed yer one for thet little affair up at Cedar Forks!"

"So because I licked you, you were prepared to kill me?"

"Thet an' other things!"

"What other things?"

"Well, yer were after me, for one thing. I knowed that becos yer went ter that cabin after my pardner——"

"Your partner? Where is he?"

"He's where neither yer nor any other blessed Mounter'll get him."

"Oh! Crossed the border, I suppose?"

"Nope! He's lying by a fire down ther river thar, a fire what's bin out two days!"

"Dead?" cried Musgrave.

"Wall! Yer may say so. Gave me quite a turn when I come upon him, et did!"

"Well, he is beyond worrying over! But tell me one thing, Ginger; not for professional purposes but for my own private information, you understand. Were those men, whom you were with, in the plot when you tried to get me?"

"Well, yer may put et thet way. They'd hev bin glad ef I'd potted yer."

"They would? Are you sure?"

"Dead sartin of et," answered the whisky-runner, who now that he was in difficulties was troubled by no sense of loyalty to come-by-chance associates.

"Why! they was after yer when I met 'em."

"They were?"

"Paid me ter help ter find yer! They wanted yer badly, partickler ther Colonel."

"You mean the Major!"

"Colonel was what he answered ter."

"Where are they now?"

Ginger Bob became suddenly reticent, as perhaps he had reason to be. He made no haste to reply and Musgrave supplemented his question with another. "Don't you know?"

"Wall, only in a way. Ther Colonel es down that way on his lonesome, a-looking for yer, an' ther young un's gone up-river with ther girl."

"With the girl?" asked Musgrave sharply.

"What girl? Do you mean that Endicott has gone off alone with the young lady whom they kidnapped from McGuire's camp?"

"So yer know of thet?"

"Of course I do! Speak, man, can't you?" cried Musgrave, rising to his feet.

"Jest thet!" said Ginger Bob, noting the other's agitation and wondering if here was something that he might turn to his own advantage. "He started ahead with ther girl yesterday mornin', an' I ain't seen him since. I guess he've a-gone off on his own with ther girl; an' I can't say as I blame him. Which way did yer come, Musgrave?"

"Through the Wolverine Gut and down the river!"

"An' yer ain't met 'em?"

"No!"

"Wall, they can't hev got as far as ther Wolverine, an' I ain't passed 'em on ther way up, an' yer hev'n't met 'em on yer way down; so I guess they must hev bunked et on some other trail," said Ginger philosophically.

Neil Musgrave, however, could not regard the

matter in the same light as his prisoner. He was greatly agitated and began to walk to and fro, a heavy frown on his face. Then he stopped suddenly.

"Does Endicott know this part of the country well?"

"Ef by Endicott you mean Maurice, I should say he knows a trifle less about it than a squirrel."

"So if he were to get lost——"

"Wall—et would mean a funeral for two!"

"Yes—I am sure of that, very sure. But tell me, Ginger, do you think the girl went willingly?"

"Wall, she went; an' I guess thet's as much as can be said, but I opine thet this mysterious disappearance es a sort of continuation of ther abduction."

"It has got to be stopped," said Musgrave explosively. "It's a positive crime. We must find out which way they have gone and——"

"Et's no business of mine."

"Isn't it?" asked Musgrave sharply. "How can you prove you have no complicity in the dastardly business? Now just listen to me, Ginger! You are my prisoner; and by rights I ought to start out with you to-morrow morning for the police-post. But I can't go away and leave an infamous affair of this sort behind me. I've got to stop it; and to do that I shall have to follow them and take you with me. Now I'll make a bargain with you. You come willingly and make no trouble, and I'll make things as easy as I can for you. The whisky-running charge will have to stand; because that's known against you down at Regina; but the charge of shooting at me, which as you'll know is a far worse crime, I'll look on as a personal matter and say nothing about if you'll agree to what I ask."

"An' ef I don't?"

"Then you'll come along just the same, even if I have to drive you every yard with a dog-whip."

"Ther deuce! But, man, ef yer lay a finger on me thet way yer'll be broke."

"Maybe! I don't care!" Musgrave laughed harshly. "But I shan't need to do that. All I should have to do will be to put the hand-cuffs on you, and a thong round your neck, with the other end tied to the sled; and I guess you'll step along fast enough."

"Jumpin' Moses—but yer a wonder, Musgrave. I'm durned ef I thought yer had et in yer!"

"The question is, do you agree?"

"Wall," answered Ginger slowly, recognising that the longer he was in getting to the police-post, the better was the chance of escape. "I guess yer don't give me much option. I'd as soon walk as he toted along at ther end of a string like a bloomin' puppy. Here's for marching—as a volunteer."

"Then that is settled, and the sooner you're in your sleeping-bag the better. We shall be off early in the morning."

"Them's marching orders, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Night-night, then! Guess yer'll tie me up?"

"I shall take precautions," answered Musgrave, with a quick, short laugh. "I don't want to lose my team a second time."

"Nope! I guess not. Wall! here's for by-by!"

The whisky-runner made his preparations for the night, and Musgrave seated himself by the fire.

"Ligoun," he said, turning to the Indian, "you heard what Ginger said about the girl."

"I hear," said the Indian.

"It is for her sake that you watch these men for Sister Margot."

"It is in my mind so," agreed Ligoun.

"And she is in danger. We must save her. In the morning you must find the trail. It ought not to be difficult. They have turned from the river trail somewhere. You must find the place."

"Fear not," said Ligoun. "I will it find."

And he was as good as his word. For an hour after daylight next morning he came into camp with a light of satisfaction in his dark eyes.

"The place is but a little way down the river, a false opening between the hills, and it is in my mind that the white man mistake it for the Wolverine."

"That is good hearing, Ligoun. We will start at once."

Quarter of an hour later under a lowering sky the two dog-teams, with Ginger occupying a middle place between Musgrave and the Indian, started on the trail of Endicott and Betty Marlowe.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOST IN THE HILLS

LIGOUN'S conjecture that Endicott had mistaken the false opening between the hills for the Wolverine Gut was a correct one. That he had apparently reached it a day before he ought to have done did not trouble Endicott. In the wilderness distances are often vague, measured from camp to camp, and maps are even vaguer, and knowing that he had pushed the pace it was no surprise that he beheld what he mistook for the opening pass.

"We turn here," he said to Betty. "This is the start of our true trail for the Mission."

He honestly believed that it was, and he was in a hurry to leave the river trail since any hour might bring the Major and Ginger Bob to interfere

with his plans; and the further he was from the main trail the better was the chance of ultimate escape. The valley into which he turned was one that might have deceived a more expert traveller than Endicott. It opened out between the foothills, behind which towered the giant peaks, for all the world like some narrow valley in the English Lakes. Pine trees clothed the hillsides and encroached on the valley itself, breaking off however at a quite definite line on either side, a fact which, if he had been more observant, would have told him that he was following the course of some small river now frozen solid, and hidden deep under drifted snows. In his inexperience, however, he never thought of that; but pushed onward, rejoicing that the trail was free from obstacles and that the surface of the snow was frozen hard.

Making a good pace they followed the winding valley, and presently the foothills gave place to taller hills, and they moved in a deadly stillness and an increasing gloom which brought a depression to their spirits. Nevertheless they travelled until it was too dark to continue further with safety, urged by the desire to put as great a distance between themselves and a possible pursuit. Both were exhausted when they camped for the night, and neither being inclined for speech, they sought their sleeping-bags early; that they might be ready for a start betimes in the morning.

With the first greyness of day, they resumed their flight, still following the narrowing valley, unconscious of the mistake that had been made. When they started there was a slight wind blowing down the valley, a mere drift of air that was such as might be expected in such a place, and that to Endicott meant nothing. But as they travelled it grew stronger, and presently if brought with it

clouds of fine snow-dust gathered from the hillsides. The snow stung their faces. It made their eyes smart and water as particles of earth-dust would have done ; and the added pressure of the air wearied them. But neither of them was daunted. With his head bent to the wind, Endicott marched ahead ; and with her head also bent, Betty marched behind, observing nothing. Presently they reached a place where the valley forked, a rocky hill splitting it like a wedge ; but as at this point there was something like a whirlwind caused by different currents of air, a whirlwind that lifted the snow and made of it a veritable blizzard, they passed the fork without noticing it, glad to be through that whirling column of snow-dust.

The wind still blew, the snow still stung their faces and their eyes still watered, but for the moment the going was easier, and they pushed on steadily, refusing to yield to mere discomfort. The way they followed began to ascend. At first the ascent was slight, but presently it was accentuated, and once or twice there were hard climbs, with deep drifts that hindered them considerably. Then quite suddenly, rounding a patch of pinewoods that hid the view, they came to a steep wall hidden in ice and snow, and which, though Endicott did not realise it, was in summer time a cascade. He gazed at it in perplexity.

"We shall have to climb," he said.

Climb they did, Endicott cutting notches in the ice and snow, carrying the stores in relays to the top, the pair of them hauling up the sled hand over hand with a rope.

Once at the top of this icy wall, Betty looked about in wonder whilst the man repacked the sled. On either hand rose hills whose tops were hidden in cloud ; and between them, perhaps three-quarters

of a mile long, was a snow-covered plain as level as a billiard table which seemed to continue round a spur of the hill that limited the view. This plain had a ragged fringe of spruce which ran up the hills a little way on either side, and across the level surface of it whirled and danced dust-devils of snow. Here the wind blew strongly, sweeping down the hillsides with icy breath, and chilling her to the bone. With a little shiver she turned her back on the scene, and for the first time since leaving camp, spoke to her companion in an intimate human way.

"This place makes me shiver. It looks so desolate and lonely."

Endicott glanced up from the lashing he was busy with, and spoke quietly. "I daresay. These northern ranges beat anything in Europe for that sort of thing. It really is desolate and lonely. We are probably the only human beings for many miles."

Betty glanced at the snow-covered plain once more. The dust-devils still whirled in eddying-wisps, nebulous to look at, but holding in them the promise of smarting eyes and stinging faces, but it was not at them she looked. Her eyes followed the fringe of trees all round the plain, and to her there came a vague sense of familiarity. That she had never seen the place before she was quite sure; but she was equally sure she had seen something like it. Then understanding came to her. By some trick of mental vision she saw the snowy plain turned to water, with the fringe of ragged woods running along the shores as woods do about a lake. The realisation was sudden, and she cried out in surprise:

"Do you know I believe this is a mountain lake?"

"What?"

Endicott straightened himself suddenly and looked round. Unquestionably Betty was right. The level plain between the hills, the contours of the rising land, the fringe of woods all bore testimony to the fact that here was a large sheet of water hidden under ice and snow. He looked back through the drifting snow mirk in the valley, and considered the last steep climb that they had made. Then he understood. The trail he had followed was not the Wolverine Gut, after all ; it was the valley of some small river which had its origin in this mountain lake, which itself probably had its birth in some glacier further up the valley. The knowledge, though it surprised him, brought no dismay. He recognised that he could make the mistake serve his plan for delay ; and when the object he sought was accomplished, and the terror and solitude had driven the girl to his arms, it would be easy enough to retrace the way down the valley. For the present he decided to keep the mistake he had made to himself, and to go forward till they were beyond pursuit.

"Yes," he said easily after his first sharp question, "I believe you are right, Betty. It is a mountain lake, and I expect the summer-trail runs along the right bank here. But we shall be able to cut straight up the middle and save time. That," he added with a pretence of laughter, "is one of the advantages of winter travel. Though one would need to be a Mark Tapley to appreciate it. Anyway we shall be able to push on quicker, and that is something."

They took to the frozen surface of the lake. The wind grew more pronounced. The whirling wisps of snow more numerous. Sometimes for a space of ten or fifteen yards they marched without being able to see a yard before them, and sometimes the

whole length of the lake grew clear to view. But now and again through the air came a scatter of snow as if some unseen hand had thrown a handful of white feathers for the wind to sport with, and always the wind itself was steadily rising. Novice as he was, Endicott was not blind to these precursors of the storm, and as they neared the head of the lake he looked for a place to camp.

Before he found it the North let loose its fury. The wind swept down from the ice-covered peaks with a roar—like the oncoming of a solid wall, by reason of the snow it brought with it. Endicott shouted to Betty, and turned the dogs shoreward. With their backs to the storm they raced for the shelter of the timber; but before they reached it the wind and the snow caught them. The shock of it threw Betty off her feet, but in a second she was up again and running after the sled, coughing, half-blinded, but resolute. The snow on the level surface of the lake began to move, rising in a fine dust before the great broom of the wind. It became impossible to see, and Endicott was forced to leave the course to the dogs, while Betty clung to the geepole of the sled, knowing that once she was separated from it and Endicott in the storm, the end would be swift and sure. The fine snow penetrated everywhere through the openings of parka and hood, beating in the face like burning dust, stinging the nostrils like a flaming breath, making vision an unendurable agony. The fur of their clothing was loaded with it, so that they moved two ghostly figures scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding whiteness. The hair of the dogs was similarly loaded, and the poor beasts after struggling for a few minutes came to a standstill, and then lay down, crouching low before the storm.

It was a critical moment. Endicott had not now

the slightest idea in which direction the shore lay, having completely lost his bearings. He shouted to Betty, and suddenly she pointed straight to their front. For one fleeting instant he caught a glimpse of the wood, less than a score of yards away. The next second the view was obliterated; but what he had seen sufficed. Instantly he fell upon the dogs with whip and voice. He lashed them mercilessly, and though at first they snarled and yelped, presently he had them on their feet and moving for the desired shelter. When they reached it, both Endicott and Betty were exhausted and gasping for breath; whilst the dogs were in no better case. They pushed on, however, until they reached a place where a rather sharp descent covered with trees offered shelter, and at the foot of it they halted.

Betty crouched in the lee of the sled, whilst Endicott groped for dry wood to kindle a fire. He found plenty, but it was some time before he could get the fire going, and the girl was shivering and her teeth chattering when the first leaping flame spurted up through the dry pinesticks. Then Endicott worked rapidly. After filling the kettle with snow, whilst it melted and boiled he shovelled snow with one of his snow-shoes to form a bank, against which other snow blown down the slope drifted and held, forming a solid screen against such wind as reached them. He thawed fish for the dogs and fed them, knowing that once they had eaten they would find cover for themselves. When the snow-water boiled he made coffee and steaming hot gave of it to Betty to drink whilst he cooked a meal; then he heaped wood on the fire, and as it flamed up and the heat of it was reflected back by the snow wall, he looked at the girl.

"Comfortable, Betty?" he asked

"Yes—under the circumstances."

"They might be worse," answered Endicott with a sharp laugh. "If this wood hadn't been here——" He broke off and shrugged his shoulders. Then he looked upwards to the humming tree-tops, across which the snow blew in clouds. "It is a regular blizzard up there."

"Yes," said Betty. "How long will it last?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. One day, two, perhaps three. Anyway we are anchored here until it ends."

As a matter of fact the blizzard lasted until the evening of the fourth day, when it blew itself out, and the stars, frostily clear, came out above the tree-tops. "If it holds, we will start in the morning," said Endicott.

"I shall be glad," said Betty, with a thought for the sad-faced nun at the Mission by the river.

Endicott looked at her thoughtfully. The four days he had spent with her had advanced his cause not one whit, as he well knew. There had been little conversation between them except at meal-times, the girl having spent most of the time of enforced inaction in her sleeping-bag, which afforded both rest and comfort. He was disappointed that so far Betty had shown no sign of turning to him; but he by no means despaired of his plan. He looked from her to the sled. Under the moosehide covering there were still provisions for three weeks, and if they stumbled on game, as they might, it would be possible to make the journey last even longer than that. And in three weeks—— He smiled slightly to himself, and then the smile died away of the suddenest as not very far off there sounded a weird howl that seemed to fill the night with menace. Two of the dogs lying on the outskirts of the camp moved nearer the fire, and sat

on their haunches growling; their ears pricked, their eyes turned from the fire towards the darkness of the wood.

"What is it?" asked Betty with a shiver.

"A wolf," he answered, stretching a hand for his rifle. "It there is only one it won't matter."

Betty, who in the course of her travelling had talked much with McGuire, knew more of the habits of wolves than he did.

"It is not likely to be a solitary wolf at this time of the year. Wolves pack in winter."

Scarcely had she spoken when the other three dogs of their team moved into the circle of the firelight, and a little time after there came the soft patter of many feet in the snow. In the darkness beyond the circle of the firelight nothing was visible as yet; but presently in the shadows under the trees Betty caught sight of two points of light that had not been there a moment before. She pointed them out to Endicott and two seconds later his rifle spat death towards the points of light. On the heel of the crack came a sharp yelp of pain, and a gaunt timber wolf leaped out of the shadows and fell into the snow, clawing and twisting in the death agony.

Instantly there was a rush of hairy forms, and half a score other wolves leaped on the fallen member of their pack. There was a horrid snarling and yelping as the wolves bunched over their cannibal feast, and Endicott fired twice into the tangle, then it broke and separated into its component parts; and what was left of the fallen wolf might have been put in a man's hat. Betty shuddered at the sight, Endicott himself was white of face, and the dogs with the hair of their shoulders bristling stood there growling and staring into the wood. Nothing was now visible, but through the deadly stillness that had followed the storm again sounded the patter

of many feet, and both the watchers knew that the wolves were moving furtively about them. Endicott glanced at Betty. Her face was pale, but there was no sign of cringing fear, such as he had half counted upon.

Out of the wood there sounded another wolf cry, a long-drawn, half-wailing, half-triumphant note, that seemed to throb through the darkness, outward and upward to the stars. Small creatures of the wood heard it and shivered, and larger ones further away threw back their heads to listen, and then instinctively turned and moved from it. The dogs, still on the alert, whined and growled, and after a moment Betty spoke.

"That is the call to meat," she said. "I have never heard it before, but Pat McGuire described it to me. Yet where is the meat?"

"Here," said Endicott grimly. "You and I are the meat. Our dogs——"

"Not if we can help it," said Betty quietly. "Let me have your pistol——"

A distant howl, the answer to the blood-call, broke in on her words, and Endicott gave her the pistol without demur. He slipped a fresh clip of cartridges into his rifle in order to have the magazine quite full; and placed a hatchet to his hand in case it should be needed. The wolves grew bolder, and occasionally a shadowy form manifested itself under the trees or a pair of bright eyes glistened. Each time that this happened, Endicott fired, occasionally with success; for sometimes the shot was followed by yelping and by horrid sounds of wrangling that told their own tale.

Such wolves as came into view were extraordinarily gaunt; and their boldness in approaching so near the camp was proof that they were starving. Some of them sat on their haunches staring at the camp,

and some walked round and round it, but there was no questioning their intentions. They were famished ; they had found meat, and they did not mean to leave it.

The attack came quite suddenly, and as it seemed accidentally. One of Endicott's shots struck a wolf which in its death leap came well within the circle of the firelight. Instantly there was a rush of the other wolves to devour it ; and as the gaunt hairy forms struggled and snarled they crowded nearer the camp. The dogs stood growling and snarling, and suddenly a huge brown timber wolf launched himself upon the nearest dog. Others followed, and in an instant the centre of the camp was a mere tangle of four-footed fury. Wolves were crowded into the fire and leaped from it, yelping agony ; others on the outskirts of the tangle fell to Endicott's rifle, then suddenly the attack thinned out. One of the dogs breaking clear of the tangle, with a howl of fear ran for the wood. The wolves followed, still intent on living meat, and except for the two humans the camp was left without life. There was blood upon the trampled snow, a few bones, a skull or two, but that was all. Not a single one of their dogs remained, except the one that had fled in the darkness and on whose death-trail the wolves were already following. Endicott's face as he turned to the girl had a sick, frightened look and in Betty's eyes as she leaned against the sled there was a light of horror.

"They will come back," said Endicott in a quaking voice. "We must prepare ! We will drag the sled round to this side, and on that side build a new fire. We may keep them off that way."

"We must," said Betty, pulling herself together, and resolutely she set to work to assist him in making the necessary preparations.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SILENT MENACE

IT was a full two hours before Endicott, watching the wood, knew that the wolves were returning.

The patter of feet was the first evidence of the fact that he had ; and the second was the gleam of eyes under the trees. He turned to the girl who, seated by one of the fires, was dozing, and he spoke to her.

"They have come back," he said. "I am going to try and pick them off as I can. They will eat any that I happen to maim, and possibly if their hunger is stayed they will leave us. Do your best to sleep. When it comes daylight we will start out of this."

Betty nodded, but did not speak. The events of the last few hours had exhausted her, and numbed all feeling ; and seated by the fire, her fur hood drawn well over her face, she presently fell sound asleep. Twice or three times in the night she was awakened by the sound of Endicott's rifle, but slept again, and when morning had broken Endicott's voice awakened her.

"The brutes are gone," he said exultantly. "They went in that direction." He waved his hand in the direction of the valley up which they had trailed to the lake. "I think they must have scented game. We go the other way. I had thought of returning to the river on our own trail, for it will be impossible to cross the hills without dogs, but there must be some other way out. In any case we cannot follow the wolves."

"But if we reach the river—where will you make for ?" asked Betty quickly

"I have thought it all out in the night," said Endicott quietly. "I will take you to McGuire's camp—unless you object."

"Object! The sooner we start the better I shall be pleased."

"It will be weary work," was the reply. "We shall have to harness ourselves to the sled, and drag it along with us, at any rate until we reach the river. Then we can load ourselves with provisions and push on without troubling about the sled."

"That seems to be the only course," answered Betty; "but if we can't go back the way we came, we shall have to be very sure of the way we follow."

"I have considered that, and when the wolves went I took a look round. There is a valley at the far end of the lake, which turns in the direction of the river. From the look of it, a stream runs along the bottom, and since we are this side the watershed it can only empty in the river we are making for. At any rate it will be worth trying."

"Then we will try it," answered Betty.

After breakfast they went through their possessions, throwing away the dog food and everything else that could be regarded as superfluous, then harnessing themselves to the sled, they started on their journey. The descent into the valley which Endicott had discovered was more difficult than either of them had anticipated, and it took at least a couple of hours to find a practicable way. It was well past noon when they reached the bottom, and tired though they were with their exertions, they resolved not to halt until the failure of daylight compelled.

Their task was a hard one. In the valley the snow was soft and feathery, and the mere walking through it was heavy work, whilst the weight of the sled behind increased their difficulty ten-fold. But

short of halting there could be no respite from labour for either of them ; the weight and strength of both being required to drag the sled with its load. Endicott went first, breaking the trail ; and Betty followed, both of them leaning to the improvised traces. In spite of the intense cold, it was warm work, and terribly exhausting. Their steps forward became almost mechanical. Before the afternoon had worn itself out, they were mere automatons, moving forward without conscious volition, a strained look on their faces ; a dulness in their eyes that proclaimed an unspeakable weariness.

Except for the noise made by the cracking of their snow-shoes and by the sled-runners, the land was cloaked in a silence that was almost terrible—a silence that filled Endicott with dread imaginings. The terror of the wilderness that he had hoped would serve to drive Betty to his arms, was awaking in himself. Once or twice as he lurched forward he tried to talk to Betty, but the sound of his own voice only accentuated the horrific silence ; and since she returned only monosyllabic answers he was constrained to desist from these attempts at companionship. The hills on either hand, clothed with funereal and sombre-looking pines, seemed to watch their puny endeavours, like sentient beings silently inimical. He had a sense of vast forces arrayed against him ; of some strange brooding malevolence that menaced his well-being, and against whose power it was useless to struggle.

When at last they halted to make camp for the night, his spirit was in rags. He glanced furtively at Betty to learn how it was with her. She looked unutterably forlorn and weary ; but her face bore no sign of the experience of the secret terrors which had ravaged his soul in the last few hours. She was

of finer spirit than himself, and that which to him had grown appalling, left her untouched.

Silently the girl helped him to make camp, and to prepare a meal ; and seated by the huge fire which they had built, ate it in a silence that to Endicott became unsupportable.

"For heaven's sake, Betty, talk !"

The girl looked at him in surprise. "I have nothing to say," she said, "and I am very tired."

"All the same talk ! Say anything. I can't stand this awful silence. I feel as if there was something else at hand, waiting for me. This stillness, this unending whiteness, the everlasting pine trees are getting on my nerves."

He glanced over his shoulder as he spoke, apprehensively, and as Betty caught the look in his eyes, she was startled. Her companion was afraid.

"What is it ?" she asked. "Are you afraid that the wolves——"

"Wolves ! No !" he laughed discordantly. "One can see them, shoot them. It is something else. I don't know how to describe it. But it is there—a—a—being whose voice is silence and whose threat is silence also. I can't find words, but don't you feel it, aren't you conscious of it ?"

Betty shook her head, stubbornly, for the manner in which Endicott had spoken, the very vagueness of his words almost moved her to the same illusion. But she shook her head and clung to facts. "No," she said, "there is nothing ! There can be nothing. You are very tired. Last night you did not sleep, and you are overstrained. You must sleep to-night, and you will feel different in the morning. I have slept a great deal in the last few days ; and I will keep the first watch."

Endicott laughed a trifle unsteadily. "I daresay

you are right. Don't think me a fool, Betty. I will take your advice. Keep up the fire and waken me instantly if anything alarms you."

He retired to his sleeping-bag, before doing so looking more than once over his shoulder in the same furtive apprehensive manner as when he had first spoken of his fears. The girl caught these looks backward and, as she sat by the fire, turned them over in her mind, considering them in conjunction with the words he had spoken. That he was afraid, was clear; and as she considered the occasion of his fear, Betty understood. Town dweller as he was, the wilderness dismayed him, and a nervous imagination playing tricks with him brought him the illusion of intangible presences. She looked across the fire down the darkness of the long valley, and caught a glow in the sky above the hills. Long streamers of light shot suddenly towards the zenith; green and purple, violet and rose-colour, they fluttered like silken ribbons in a wind; and across the intense stillness of the frozen hills came a faint, intermittent crackling, the voice of the Aurora, felt rather than heard.

The girl glanced round to where her companion lay in his sleeping-bag; then as she turned again to watch the great pyrotechnic display that was nature's own, she smiled a little to herself. No doubt, if Maurice Endicott had been awake, his disturbed mind would have found in those quivering ribbons of light one more evidence of the intangible presences that troubled him! But he slept, and in that sleep as she hoped would be restoration. In the morning he would be himself.

But in the morning he was morose and silent. Over breakfast he scarcely spoke at all, and in his eyes was still the look of fear that she had observed on the previous day. When they had harnessed

themselves to the sled again, and were on their way once more, he looked continually from right to left, in the jerky manner of a man whose will is losing control; and once as they came to a place where the valley narrowed, and which had a dark, frowning look, he stopped suddenly. . .

"What is it?" asked Betty.

"Let us go back," he whispered.

"Go back!" she cried. "Why——"

"Hss-s-h!" he interrupted whisperingly. "They will hear you."

"Who will hear me?" she asked quietly, fighting the deadly fear that was mounting in her own heart. "Whom are you talking of?"

"Of Them," he whispered hoarsely, turning to her a ravaged face that she found unutterably startling. "They are waiting for us there!"

Betty crushed down her rising fear. It was clear that Endicott's mind, beset by imaginary fears, was tottering; and she was amazed at the swiftness with which this had come about. She did not know in the four days when she had been in her sleeping-bag at the camp in the hollow where they had sheltered, the man had sat brooding, listening to the shriek of the wind, and finding in it a threatening voice; nor did she know that even as their flight from Major Andover had commenced his spirits had already been touched by these fears. But she understood well what was happening. Pat McGuire had told her of a man, a rich miner with a magnificent dog-team, who had come to his own winter camp upon the Yukon, his face wet with sweat, his nostrils quivering, his eyes wide with fear.

"They're after me, McGuire," the man had cried sobbingly.

"Who's after ye?" Pat had asked, reaching for his rifle. "Injuns?"

"Injuns," the man had laughed discordantly. "No!" Then his voice sunk to a whisper. "Them what lives up there, Pat."

"He waved his hand nor-ard," Pat had said, "an' the look on the face av him gave me the shivers. He said they'd catch him sooner or later unless he got to Dawson quick, an' by the tale av him he had raced eight hundhred miles, an' made a record av ut. He nivver slept a wink thot night; an' marnin' afther he was off again, as if the divvle was at the heels av him. I heard long afterwards that he reached a police-camp up the river, seemingly by the skin av his teeth, an' that he stopped there through the winter, going out whin the ice broke in the spring, an' that he's a city-councillor at 'Frisco now, as sane as ye or me; but he was no sane man whin he came to me on the Yukon. Mad as a coot, he was!"

Betty recalled this story now, and in spite of her fears spoke firmly.

"We can't go back, Maurice! We must go forward. And it is all nonsense about there being any one in the wood. Change places with me, and I'll lead you through."

Without a word Endicott took the second place in the traces; and no doubt a little steadied by the sight of the girl's form in front of him, allowed himself to be led through the defile in front.

As they passed through it the country opened out considerably, and before them was a wide valley, surrounded on every side by hills. The place looked like a great basin along the bottom of which they crawled, and the sides of which offered no outlet. At the sight Betty's heart sank. She had hoped that once through the defile there would have been some indication of the river to which they moved; instead of which there came a sudden conviction that they had simply lost themselves in the hills.

The position was very serious and Endicott was in no condition to retrieve it, his one apparent desire being to put as great a stretch as possible between himself and the defile from the passage of which he had shrunk. As she moved forward, toiling at the traces, her muscles stiff and sore, she considered the lie of the land carefully. The hills to the right from the position of the sun, represented the western side of the basin ; and westward lay the river which was their bourne. If they could find a passage through or over the hills all might yet be well. If not—— She forbore from considering the possibilities further. Without consulting Endicott she began to bear westward. Their course across the wide valley was like that of a slow-moving beetle across a vast white sheet of paper—a mere crawl. When dusk came, they were not half-way to the hills, and in the shelter of a pinewood they camped for the night.

To all outward appearances, Endicott was quite rational, except for a rather unusual glitter of the eyes. He prepared the camp, and whilst Betty busied herself with cooking, he cut a store of logs for the night. Over the meal he talked cheerfully, and occasionally he even laughed ; though once he checked himself suddenly, and turned swiftly to glance into the darkness of the wood. A moment later he was himself again, and when the time for retiring came insisted that there was no need to keep watch that night.

“We have left the wolves behind. We are alone in the wilderness. If we build up the fire, there is no need for sentry-go.

The girl agreed, and unutterably tired crept into her sleeping-bag. But at first the sleep she sought was denied her. Bone-tired as she was, her mind was unusually active, and after reviewing the events

of the day, and resolving that in the morning she would herself again direct the course to be followed, she let her thoughts rove. Pat McGuire came to her mind. She wondered if by this time he were following her, and if he would find her. If he had left his camp, it would be useless to make for it since—— She checked the thought without completing it. "Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof," and there was a sufficiency of present evils without burdening herself with any that the future might hold. Her thoughts went further afield to Major Andover and the purpose of his northland quest; to the sad-faced nun at the Orphanage at the McQuestin River. Her mother! She had never been able to grasp the thought of a living mother since Maurice Endicott had given her the news, and the reality of it eluded her now. Her thoughts travelled further still. Neil! Would he ever know how she had sought him? Would he, in spite of what had happened in England, understand the reality of her love? Would he forgive her seeming harshness? Her letter had gone unanswered, had it never reached him; or receiving it, had he deliberately refrained from replying? She thought for a moment of the dragon-lidded box. Had he after all yielded? Did that account for his silence? She dismissed the conjecture instantly. Somehow that was the one point on which she had no doubt whatever. She was sure that he would conquer and that the resolution which had taken him from Pat McGuire to fight his battle under other conditions, would not fail him. And on that consoling thought she fell asleep.

When she awoke, and threw aside the head-covering of her sleeping-bag, it was broad day, and the fire was a mere smouldering heap of white ashes. She glanced towards the place where her companion

had lain. He was not there, and apparently was nowhere about. In an instant she was out of the bag, and when she had changed her night moccasins for the moccasins for the trail, she began to investigate.

The packages on the sled had been opened, as she noted at once, and certain food had been taken. Endicott's snow-shoes and rifle had also disappeared. and leading out of the camp was a trail that went straight up the wide valley, diverging from the hills towards which she had set their course on the previous day. A sharp clutch of fear came to her heart as she read the signs; then she told herself that Endicott must have seen game, and gone out on the trail of it. But even as this explanation came to her, her mind rejected it. If that were the explanation, why had he taken a portion of the stores? Why had he not awakened her to inform her of his purpose? Her eyes surveyed the waste in the direction whither the trail led. Nothing moved on the white surface; but here and there in the middle distance were small woods which might easily conceal the man she looked for.

Perplexed and worried, she set to work to build up the fire and prepare breakfast for herself. When that was done she surveyed the landscape again—but in vain. Apparently she herself was the only living thing between the white walls of the hills. A sense of desolation and of utter loneliness oppressed her, and the "Great White Silence" of the North appalled her. Conscious of the stirrings within herself of the fears which had broken down Maurice Endicott on the previous day, she began to bustle about, packing the sled ready for an early departure in case he should return, cutting wood for firing in case he did not. Then putting on her snow-shoes she walked about half a mile to a rise in the ground

from which a better view might be obtained. From this point of vantage once more she searched the valley carefully. Nowhere was there any moving thing; everywhere the stillness, the snow and the funereal pines.

Disheartened she went back to camp, and debated what she should do. She might make a small package of food, and follow on Maurice Endicott's trail in the hope of overtaking him. But, as she told herself, he had many hours' start, and if she did not overtake him in a very short time, her food would give out, and she would be left face to face with starvation. She might follow on his trail with the sled; but if she did that it was utterly hopeless that she could overtake a man travelling light, and there was the further objection that the way he was following, in her view, could only lead further into the hills and so further from safety. In the end, she decided that she would remain at the camp until morning; and then if Endicott had not returned, on the morrow she would follow the westward trail, dragging the sled with her.

The day wore slowly through to evening, without bringing the return of the man she was waiting for, and it was whilst preparing the evening meal that she found the explanation of Endicott's flight. In the mouth of a sack containing beans, and which she had not used in the morning, she came on a folded piece of paper, evidently placed there in the expectation of her finding it. There was a pencil scrawl on the side that was uppermost, and the words leaped instantly to her eye:

"I am going. THEY are in the wood watching. One of them spoke to me in the darkness. If I do not go they will have me.

"MAURICE."

A chill of fear passed over her as she read the cryptic words. She gave a swift glance at the sombre pinewood, and almost she cried out. Then she got the grip of herself and checked the surging fear within her. This she told herself was the explanation of Endicott's disappearance. Some time in the night, whilst she slept, his hallucinations had returned, and he had fled, urged by a baseless fear. And she could do nothing. With that fear harrying his spirit he would travel fast and far. It was hopeless even to think of following him ; but as she looked into the gathering darkness, and thought that somewhere out there in the waste his mind was ravaged by creatures of his own creation, the formless fear again rose in her own heart ; and she had a swift overwhelming sense of panic.

Fighting against it, she cooked her meal, and ate it steadily, refusing to think ; then she built up her fire ; and before retiring once more considered the panic-stricken note.

It was written on half a sheet of note-paper that had plainly formed part of a letter ; and there was writing on the other side. As she glanced at it a beloved name caught her eye ; and without any scruple she read.

" . . . Musgrave has gone, the bills will be cancelled and returned to you ; though as you know they total up to quite a respectable sum. The Major has his own interests to serve and they are not yours, though they will be achieved by the same means. So between the two of you the Ace of Spades should prove a trump card.

" Sincerely yours,

" JESSE APPELYARD."

She stared at the fragment in amazement, trying to puzzle out its meaning. The one possible word

that had preceded the mention of her lover's name instantly occurred to her. "When——"

The rest, as she felt sure, had a dark significance. The Ace of Spades she knew was sometimes used as the sign of death, and she had little doubt that it was so used here, and by death—the death of Neil?—the cancellation of certain bills was to be earned by Endicott; whilst Major Andover's differing interests were to be served in the same dark way. All her fears for her lover returned to her; all her old, half-formed suspicions took definite shape and became absolute convictions. She was conscious of a great anger and loathing against the two men whom she knew and who had plotted with this unknown third for Neil's destruction. No more did she concern herself for her late companion wandering somewhere in the snowy vastness, harried by the creatures of his now disordered mind. Her indignant mind repudiated utterly Major Andover's claim of parentage. Her heart yearned for Neil, moving perhaps even now among unknown and unrealised perils; and in this new concern, she forgot her own perilous situation, and was saved from the surge of that fear of intangible things and presences inimical, which imagination had made real to Endicott and which had driven him forth to the waste in such panic flight.

CHAPTER XX

OUT OF THE NIGHT

WITH the coming of the storm that had driven Endicott and Betty to shelter, Neil Musgrave, hot upon their trail, was also forced to camp, and, for the four days that it raged, to remain inactive, eating his heart out with anxiety.

On the fifth day when the pursuit was resumed all sign of the trail was lost, and when he and his companion reached the place where the valley forked, not knowing which their quarry had followed they prospected both ways, and finally took the one to the right, which presently began to bear to the west. As they travelled they kept a sharp look-out for any signs of encampment, and on the second day were driven to the conclusion that they had gone astray and that the trail was utterly lost.

That night Musgrave had a consultation with the Indian, and found that the latter's opinion agreed with his own.

"The man and the girl go the other valley. The snow make them camp; then they go on. They other side the hills."

"Yes," said Musgrave despairingly, "and if we go back we shall lose another two days."

"So," said Ligoun, looking up to where the stars shone coldly above the heights. "But if the hills be crossed——"

"We can cross them?" interrupted the policeman excitedly.

"I do not know," replied the Indian quietly, "I not been here. But a way may be found; and if it is found we save much time. Maybe from the heights we see the girl and the man and make a cut-off."

"Then in the morning we will cast about, and try to find a way over, Ligoun. It will be much better than going back."

Ginger Bob had listened to the conversation without intervening; but he marked what was said, and was far from easy as he contemplated the journey in prospect. In the morning he looked at the hills with thoughtful eyes; and when Ligoun

departed to prospect for a way, he expressed his mind.

"Say, Musgrave, yer never goin' ter be sech a blamed fool as ter try an' cross them hills?"

"That is the idea."

"Then ther sooner et ain't ther idear ther better; et can't be done."

"Why not?" asked Musgrave sharply.

"Well, jest cast yer eyes ter thet place between ther two hills thar."

Musgrave looked towards the place indicated and a puzzled expression came on his face.

"See anything?" asked the whisky-runner.

"Nothing particular! Certainly nothing to hinder."

"Nothing ter hinder!" Ginger snorted contemptuously. "Then look again and tell me what yer do see!"

Wondering if something had missed his gaze Musgrave looked again, long and carefully. All that he saw was one or two little clouds of vapour, which seemed to stream from the hills—nothing else; and he said so.

"Zactly," said Ginger Bob, "an' that vapour, as yer calls et, es snow—snow thet's blowin' in ther wind thet's nearly allus lifting on ther tall hills, I know. I've seen thet kind o' thing before up in ther Katmi Pass in Alaska. Man, et's an awfu' blizzard on ther tops of them hills, an' I ain't havin' none. Hari-kari ain't my style yet, an' when et es I'll go out with a pistol to my head, an' not freeze like a durned Esquimaux in ther snow."

"You'll go the way I want you," said Musgrave quietly.

"Ter the p'leece-post, yep. But it ain't up thar, an' I ain't takin' no trips across bloomin' glaciers"

"If I go there, you'll go too, if I want you."

"Oh, will I? I suppose yer are thinking o' thet dog-whip thet yer talked of ther other day."

"No," said Musgrave quietly. "I wasn't thinking of that."

"Then may I make so bold as ter inquire what yer were thinkin' of?"

"Well," answered Musgrave smilingly, "I was thinking that if you didn't want to come, I could leave you here."

"Leave me here?" Ginger's heart jumped at the idea. "Let me camp here, yer mean?"

"If you want to do so. I shan't hinder you."

"Whacks at ther provisions, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose wrong."

Ginger Bob stared at him in wrathful amazement. "Do you mean thet you'd leave me here ter starve, whilst yer goes off wi' my dogs——"

"My dogs, I think, Ginger," interrupted Musgrave with a laugh. "You're forgetting that you stole them, aren't you? My dogs and my provisions—and a man does what he likes with his own, you know. . . . You can stay here, if you insist; but you know the terms, so you can think them over. Another thing—if you decide to accompany us you'll do your share of the work, without shirking; for I don't question that to cross those hills is going to be a trying job. If you come you'll have to help all you're able."

"An' ef I stops I starves! Yer a nice sort o' Christian, ain't yer?"

"About the average," laughed Musgrave, turning and beginning to pack the sled.

About two hours afterwards Ligoun returned, and reported that he had found what looked like a feasible way across the hills. Then Musgrave

looked at Ginger, who immediately began to put on his snow-shoes.

"I goes with yer," he said. "Guess I can say what I remember o' the burial service over yer frozen remains."

Musgrave laughed, and forthwith they started on a journey that none of them will ever forget. At first the going was fairly easy, up the side of a hill, whence they gradually worked round in the direction of the smoking mountain-tops. But at the end of two hours their real difficulties began, for by that time they had passed the timber-line, and were fronting the glacial slopes. Bluffs lifted themselves in their way, which when they could not be skirted had to be climbed; the sled being unpacked and its contents carried up on their shoulders. Treacherous snow-filled hollows intervened, where the snow crust broke through, so that more than once dogs and men were in danger of being smothered. Then came the downy snow of the heights which no trampling would make firm; which had to be waded through, and wherein the dogs marched breast-deep. Then the three men toiled mightily to pull the sled forward, dragging it through and under rather than over the mountain snow. Before they gained the head of this virgin pass Ginger's estimate of the clouds of vapour was justified. They encountered wind, the iron wind of the North, the deathly breath of the high altitudes laden with snow gathered from the hill-tops. The wind and snow together made a blinding inferno. More than once they were forced to halt in the shelter of convenient rocks, and when they started again it was with heads lowered, and with every nerve crying out in travail. . . .

Late in the afternoon they passed the head of the pass, and began the descent on the further side

Their toil was scarcely lessened, the dangers if anything were increased. Constantly they found themselves on the edge of dizzy cliffs; once Ginger slipped down a declivity into deep snow from which he was dug out sobbing and cursing, and more than once the whole party wandered into drifts from which it was difficult to extricate themselves. But as the day wore on the wind slackened, and the air cleared of snow, and they reached the first wood a few stunted willows. Beyond lay the spruce, and there was comparative safety. Musgrave cried out in exultation:

"We've made it, Ginger!"

"Yes," growled Ginger, "we've made et; but how we're goin' ter get back——?"

He got no further. A loose stone under the snow suddenly gave way. Ginger tried to save himself but failed and rolled down a slope which was not very steep, and landed up against one of the willows at the bottom. Then he tried to lift himself, and rolled over again with a grunt of pain.

"What is it?" asked Musgrave, making his way to him.

"My ankle!" answered the whisky-runner tersely. "Et's broke or twisted."

With a feeling of dismay, the policeman made such examination as was possible without removing the footgear and then asked: "Sure you can't walk, Ginger?"

"Dead sure. But I can try. Guess we hev got ter get down ter the big timber before dark."

Musgrave helped him to his feet, and Ginger made the attempt. A groan was torn from him as he did so, but he set his teeth and tried again. The second attempt demonstrated that it was impossible for him to move without assistance, and in the end, the Indian went on with the dogs to

make a camp, whilst Musgrave and the injured man followed on at a much slower pace, the former assisting his prisoner as best he could over the rough ground.

When they reached the big timber it was quite dark ; but Ligoun had a great fire going, and a meal already cooking, which gave Ginger new heart.

"Nope," he said, when Musgrave proposed to examine his foot. "Guess I'd as soon stoke up before inspectin' damages. Thet bacon smells mighty good."

The meal was made, and then followed the inspection of the injured foot and ankle ; both were badly swollen and discoloured, and when the investigation was completed, Ginger asked sharply, "Broke ?"

"I think not," answered Musgrave, looking at Ligoun.

"Not broke," agreed the Indian. "Him pull hard an' twist."

"He means the muscles are badly wrenched," explained Musgrave. "I've seen something like it before. It ought to be strapped up ; but as we've no plaster, we shall have to manage with bandages."

"How long of a job es it ?" asked Ginger.

"Don't know. Depends on the extent of the injury. But it will be a week at least."

Ginger whistled softly, and wondered to himself what the policeman would do ! They had risked death and fought their way over the hills to save a couple of days or so ; and now were faced with a week's delay, when there certainly was need for haste, if they were to get on the girl's trail. As he bandaged the foot Neil Musgrave also wondered what would have to be done ; and he had not reached any solution of the problem, when an hour later, as they sat smoking by the fire, the Indian

rose suddenly to his feet, and stood staring into the darkness.

"What is it?" asked Musgrave quickly.

"There is some one who comes," answered the Indian. Both the white men listened, and then Ginger growled his opinion on the statement.

"Oh, rot!"

But Ligoun maintained his attitude of attention and presently the white men caught the sound which he had heard long before them. It was the faint crunch! crunch! of snow-shoes. The sound came nearer; and Musgrave was conscious of a mounting excitement. Wild thoughts drifted across his mind; impossible hopes leaped in his heart. Perhaps Betty—

"Ther beggar's travellin' whoever he es! Guess he's makin' for this camp; an' et's plain he ain't got no dogs."

"How do you know?" asked Musgrave, as a sharp disappointment fell on him.

"They'd hev given tongue before this. Dogs es mortal human; an' they knows when they're makin' for a camp."

The unseen traveller came nearer, the crunch of the shoes every moment becoming more distinct, then out of the shadows a form emerged, hurrying, stumbling towards the fire. He reached the circle of light it made and gave a great sobbing yell of relief, which startled the three men who heard it. Then he looked back into the darkness and laughed in delirious triumph. As he turned again Musgrave caught sight of a scabbled, cracked, frost-blackened face that spoke of hardship and privation, of eyes that were lit with the fires of madness, then the man collapsed suddenly and fell forward at Ginger's side, rolling over as he did so. The whisky-runner leaned forward, looked at the frost-scarred face, then gave a shout.

"Maurice! Guess the girl's all in, Musgrave!"

The policeman, with a great fear in his heart, examined the fallen man. Ginger had made no mistake. The newcomer was indeed Maurice Endicott, who, fleeing from the unseen terrors that beset him, had wandered in a circle, and attracted by the light of the fire had reached a place of safety. But he was far gone, his mind a mere wreck, his powers so broken and his memory so impaired, that even after they had fed and warmed him, he could give no rational account of what had happened to him. He babbled endlessly of the unseen presences that he feared. He could tell how they had almost caught him, of how he had buried himself in a drift to escape them; of how at another time they had driven him into the fire, as his scorched furs bore testimony; but no account could he give of his wanderings, or of the whereabouts of Betty. Only one seemingly partly rational statement did Musgrave manage to extract from him.

"The dogs are with her. Yes! I left them. They looked at me with mad eyes. They were the servants of the Silent Ones. I dare not take them."

It was the only crumb of comfort that Musgrave was able to extract from all the harried man's ravings, and he listened to them half the night in the hope of stumbling on some clue to Betty's whereabouts. But the clue was not given, nor was it any better in the morning, when Endicott had slept; for then he was morose and silent with the baleful light of madness in his eyes. He recognised neither Musgrave nor Ginger; and after repeated attempts to make him talk, Ginger looked at the policeman.

"What yer goin' ter do, Musgrave?"

"I'm going to take the dogs and look for her, she can't be far away."

"Yer going ter leave me with thes madman?"

"You will have Ligoun," answered Musgrave sharply.

"Oh, don't think I'm blaming you. I wish I could go with yer. Yer've a 'mighty job in front of yer."

"And little time to do it in, I'm afraid. Think of it, Ginger! A girl all alone in these hills!"

"Yep!" Ginger glanced at Endicott as he replied, and his manner told quite plainly what he expected as well as the words which he did not complete.

"If yer find her——"

"No! No! Ginger."

"There's no telling! He's crumpled up as many a better man before him, but the girl may pull through—though I wouldn't bet a dime on it."

And with this worst of all fears added to the others which thronged his heart, Musgrave started out on the trail of Betty Marlowe.

CHAPTER XXI

JOURNEY'S END

WHEN Betty Marlowe awoke after her solitary night, the first thing she did was to look round for any sign of Endicott. She saw none. The whiteness between the hills was barren of life, and nowhere was there any tell-tale column of smoke. She felt no disappointment that such was the case. There was a hot indignation in her heart as she thought of the torn letter which had confirmed her suspicions, and, desperate as her case was, she wished never to see Maurice Endicott again, even though he should be sane and in a condition to deliver her from the perils which beset her. Those perils she recognised frankly, but she refused

to dwell upon them, and after that first look round, she busied herself about necessary tasks, prepared and ate a meal, then packed the sled and harnessing herself thereto started again for the hills.

Her progress was very slow ; a mere snail's crawl across the waste. And there was something appalling in the awful stillness and solitude. She seemed the only living thing in a dead world ; and as she trudged on, bending her light-weight to the sled, odd fancies began to come to her—the fancies which had overborne her late companion. The trees seemed to be watching her. The hills towards which she moved appeared to have an interest in her doings. All the frozen world of the North seemed like a great impassive face, behind whose impassivity there lurked an active enmity. Once or twice she had a feeling as if something or some one was watching her from behind ; and uneasily turned her head to make sure that it was not so. She recognised these thoughts for what they were, the beginnings of those delusions which had sent Maurice Endicott fleeing to the waste ; and she did her best to ignore them and dismiss them from her mind, realising the danger that was in them.

She was not altogether successful in this endeavour. Again and again through the morning the thoughts recurred ; and she had much difficulty to refrain from dwelling on them ; but afternoon brought some deliverance. The ground grew worse as she approached the hills. It became more broken, and small bushes everywhere cropped up in the snow, with occasional masses of rock that made the hauling of the sled a terrible toil. Her body grew very tired ; and this utter weariness brought a numbness to the mind that was a relief, since thought no longer troubled her. Except that she had the will to win, the will to live in spite of all, she was like

a mere automaton. She trudged forward slowly, steadily, with no spring in her body, no light of hope in her eyes, a forlorn creature driven forward by grim necessity.

The short day seemed as interminable as the way she travelled ; but at last dusk began to fall in the white land, and with the dusk came a few flakes of snow driving in the wind that in the last hour or so had been steadily rising. She looked about her for a place to camp, found one, and then for an hour was busy with tasks that occupied her mind to the exclusion of less desirable things.

But when she sat by the fire, the undesirable thoughts recurred. Her body was very tired, but her brain was feverishly active ; and possibly because of the strain of the day, she was more sensitive to impressions than ever. And the immensities of the North thrust themselves once more upon her consciousness. The great darkness outside the radiance of her fire seemed to be waiting to advance and engulf her. The wind, now a mere sough across the snow and now a shrieking voice in the tree-tops, seemed an active enemy ; and the snow which it brought, no longer feathery, but hard and shot-like, was a weapon in the wind's hand.

Seated with her back to the sled so placed as to shelter her from the wind, she watched the snow whirl and curl on either side of her, and wondered how long it would continue. It might go on for days, days in which she would be confined to this lonely camp. In any case it would make travelling more difficult than ever, and the way over or through the hills yet remained to be discovered. She seemed further away from safety than ever. A sense of futility swept over her. As she watched the drifts grow on either side of the sled, curling strangely near the fire, she visioned them growing and growing

until all the camp was crowded by them, the fire extinguished, herself engulfed; and nowhere was there deliverance to be found. She saw herself lying there cold and still under the snow, for ever lost to the world that had known her, and suddenly conscious of how puny was a human being in the hands of a Nature that was so inimical, in a swift access of despair she bent her face in her mittened hands and wept.

. . . But that dark hour of despair, though she did not know it, was the hour of deliverance; and not racing, but staggering through the snow, defying the forces that had momentarily broken her spirit, came human help, inspired by great love. For, from the lower reaches of the hills, where he had left his companions, looking across the white valley apparently utterly empty of life, Neil Musgrave had seen one spot that broke the universal pall of snow. It was no more than a pin-point of blankness in the white waste; but from it he made with all speed, and discovered the ashes of a camp-fire; the camp from which Endicott had fled a fugitive pursued by the phantoms of his mind. The signs he found there puzzled him not a little. The snow-shoe trails up the valley he could not understand at all. Two had gone forth, one only had returned. The sled-trail with the absence of any dog tracks was another enigma. Quite plainly some one was moving in the direction of the hills dragging a sled. Who was it? Endicott in the one seemingly rational statement that he had made, had said that he had left the dogs with the girl, but where were they?

He examined the footmarks in the snow carefully. Prints of moccasined feet were everywhere, but one set were much smaller than the other, and one pair of the snow-shoes the trail of which went up the valley were smaller also. And it was the person

wearing the smaller snow-shoes that had returned, as it was that person who, harnessed to the sled, had moved at right angles from the other trail. From the smallness of the footprints he easily deduced that a woman's foot had made them, and he was conscious of a surge of hope within him as he considered them. They might have been made by some Indian woman, but, on the other hand, it was possible that Betty's feet had made them. He examined the camp more closely, and then stumbled on evidence which seemed conclusive—a thin brass-tipped pencil such as ordinarily goes with a pocket-book. It was a small thing ; but his heart leaped at the sight of it. No Indian had ever owned that, and now it seemed clear that Endicott's remark about the dogs had been mere delirium, and that, without a team, the girl he sought was following the westward trail, dragging the sled with her.

It was noon as he turned to follow the sled-trail, his heart rejoicing as he urged the dogs forward. He would travel unceasingly until he overtook her. Not another night should she spend alone in the waste. With his dogs he travelled much faster than the girl in front of him, and in two hours and a half he reached Betty's first solitary camp. He did not linger there. The short Northland day was almost done, and there was no time to lose. He pushed both the dogs and himself recklessly. He must find Betty without fail, and he was not afraid of missing the trail in the gathering darkness, for the dogs would follow the trail already broken, having the same instinct as human beings for the line of least resistance.

It began to blow. The snow that had driven Betty to camp swept down upon him, buffeting him and his team, and making the trail a laborious agony. Yet he kept on. He could not have far

to go, and if he allowed himself to camp the falling snow would hide the sled-trail he followed, and he might never find it again. The dogs began to flounder, and he moved ahead to pack the fast disappearing trail. He travelled with frenzied haste and exhaustion mounted within him. But he would not yield to it and fought his way onward.

The wind veered a little, bringing the snow cuttingly to his side. The frozen particles whirled by him in a blinding sheet. His eyes wept continually as he strove to see the vanishing trail. The greatness of his efforts made him pant and grasp, and there was imminent danger that his lungs might freeze. But he disregarded it, staggering onward, defying the death elements, with the moment steadily approaching when he must be overcome by them.

That he could endure much longer seemed impossible ; and with the consciousness of the imminence of defeat, a thought came to him. The cocaine ! It would give him fictitious strength ; stimulate his jaded energies ; whip up all his failing powers for a mighty effort. An hour more might accomplish his task, and the drug would be good for that ; it would help him to reach Betty.

The temptation was a severe one, and in an instant the craving which had troubled him little of late, awoke into vigorous life. The exhaustion under which he staggered made the craving clamorous. And it was to save Betty——

Then came the swift thought of his better self. Would Betty be glad of a salvation thus accomplished—at the price of the work of months undone, at the price perhaps of his soul ; for once he yielded, he knew that there was no end to the road along which weakness might carry him ? He knew that Betty would not approve, and as the temptation

surged anew, he shouted desperately into the wind and snow and darkness, as if in answer to the solicitation of some living presence.

"No! No! No!"

Then out of the darkness ahead came a glow that made his heart leap. The snow swept down thickly, obliterating it; but a moment later it appeared again and he knew that it was no illusion, for it remained. Wildly exultant he staggered on a score of paces and the glow took the outlines of a fire, blurred by the rain of snow. Another dozen paces and he became conscious of a small figure, sitting with head bowed in hands—Betty. He had no doubt of it, and the forlornness of her attitude tore at his heart-strings. A few paces more and in spite of the noise of the storm he was within earshot.

"Betty!" he cried exultantly. "Betty!"

He saw the girl's head lift suddenly; saw her leap to her feet and standing look dazedly into the night, and shouted again.

"Betty!"

Then to the girl's dazed eyes his figure emerged from the mirk, a blessed reality, with arms outstretched to receive her, and sobbing with the suddenness of a great relief, she flung herself into them.

* * * * *

An hour later when he had listened to her story, he told his own.

"Of course, my dear, I answered your letter. It is waiting for you somewhere in the Southland now—at your home at Ottawa, I have no doubt."

"And what did you answer?" she asked quickly.

"That I could not go to you—then! That you were right, at the very start, and that the risk was one that no woman should be asked to take."

"And you believed that after my letter saying I was willing to face it?"

"Then more than ever," he answered quietly.

"And is the risk that was still a risk?" she asked quickly.

He remembered the fierce moments out in the storm and darkness, and for a moment weighed the facts in judgment. He had fought and won through the fiercest temptation that he could ever be assailed with, and now he was sure of himself.

"No," he said quietly and gravely. "I do not think it is."

"Nor do I," she answered swiftly. "Neil, have you that box?"

He fumbled in his furs, and producing it, handed it to her. She looked at it carefully, saw that the seal had been chipped away, and the ribbon half cut. Then she spoke.

"My seal, I see, has suffered an accident."

"It was not an accident, Betty," he said quietly. "There was a time when I was strongly tempted and when I almost gave way. I started to open the box——"

"I know, Neil," she interrupted. "It was when you thought me faithless."

"No, not faithless!" he protested. "But I was certainly a little knocked by——"

"I know," broke in Betty. "Pat McGuire told me about that. There were excuses for you. But was that the only time you were tempted?"

"Not by a good many," he replied. "Even to-night——"

"To-night?" she echoed in astonishment.

"Yes."

He told her what had happened out in the storm, how for her sake he had been tempted to stimulate his failing energies and for her sake had refused.

Betty listened quietly, and at the end said quite simply :

"I can understand how you felt ; and I could have forgiven you if you had yielded. But I am glad you thought and acted as you did ; for now there is no need of forgiveness, and—here is the end of what lay between us."

She moved her hand quickly, and the silver box with its dragon-lid and its worse than dragon contents shot into the glowing heart of the fire, where in a few minutes or so it was lost to view. Both watched it until it disappeared ; then Betty turned to him and asked suddenly : "Neil, who is Jesse Appleyard ?"

"Jesse Appleyard !" he cried in surprise. "What do you know about him, Betty ?"

"Nothing," she answered. "That is why I ask. Tell me."

"He is a money-lender in London to whom I once had recourse for help to pay a heavy gambling debt. But you need not worry about him, Betty dear. My debt to him is discharged ; and I shall never gamble again."

"Tell me who took you to him, Neil ; or who suggested him to you, if you can !"

"Oh, that is easy enough," he laughed. "It was Maurice Endicott."

"And the gambling debt—had Maurice Endicott anything to do with that ?"

"He had everything, he—and Major Andover. But why do you ask, Betty ? There is no need to trouble about a thing that is done with, and the like of which will not happen again."

"It is you I am troubling over, Neil dear," she answered gravely. "Read that."

She handed to him the fragment of letter upon which Endicott had written his message of madness :

and as he read it, he frowned in perplexity, and pursed his lips to a whistle of surprise.

"What do you make of it?" she asked.

"Well," he said slowly, "its purport seems pretty clear in the light of the significance of recent events."

"Yes," she answered, "that is how I feel, and from the beginning I have felt it, and have been afraid for you."

"But there is something behind this letter that I do not understand," he said. "Why should Appleyard desire my death and be willing to pay for it; and what interests of Major Andover can there be that my death would serve?"

"That you have to discover; and if in no other way then from that man Appleyard himself."

"I'll make him tell me," he answered, laughing a little grimly. "With this note in my possession he can scarcely refuse. It will be a little time before I can question him, but when I do, I will have the truth——"

"I truly hope you will," replied Betty. "I hate that man though I have never seen him, and the man who claims to be my father I will never speak to again." She was silent for a little time, and then she said quietly: "I should like to see my . . . my mother."

"You shall," he answered. "We will return by the McQuestin Orphanage; but I am afraid it will be a little time. My prisoner, Ginger Bob, has an injured foot, and will not be able to travel for a few days; and though your mother's servant Ligoun is at my camp, I think I cannot let you go with him, or trust you with any one but myself again."

"I am not very anxious to leave you," answered Betty with a little sobbing laugh. "You don't know how lonely I have been. To-night before you came I had grown deadly afraid."

"I can understand that," he answered gently
"But there is no more reason for fear."

"It was foolish of me——"

"It was very brave of you to face a desperate position so pluckily," he said, with whole-hearted admiration, and, as he finished speaking, bent and kissed her.

. . . It was two days later when they reached the camp on the hills, after a journey that notwithstanding the toil of the trail had been one of unalloyed happiness. Ginger Bob, whose foot was improving, received Musgrave facetiously.

"Thet ther Indian was growin' jumpy, but I knew yer would show up an' bring ther girl along with yer. As I tole him yesterday, I never met such a man in my born days for gatherin' folk ter himself. Here's four of us now, an yer started out alone. Wonder who ther blazes yer'll gather for yer nose-gay next? But that Endicott he's no catch! Mad as a coot, he is. Yer'll need help ter get me an' him down ter yer durned police-post."

Maurice Endicott was certainly in a bad way. His reason seemed to be completely gone. He showed not the slightest sign that he recognised Betty; but clung closely to the fire and to the company of those about him. He had to be watched night and day, when once more they took the trail; and of the sombre woods and the silent hills he betrayed an agonised fear that would have been pitiable in a child, but which in a man was startlingly abject. Ligoun helped to watch both him and Ginger; though there was little fear of the latter taking to the waste without dog-team or food. But as Musgrave knew, Ginger was unscrupulous enough to steal what he needed, and leave the whole party to perish if he could make good his escape, so vigilance was never relaxed and the

whisky-runner recognising the fact gave no trouble. It was eight days before they reached the Wolverine Gut, and there, signs of moose having been found, they camped whilst Ligoun went after the game, in the hope of replenishing their stock of food.

And to this camp towards the end of the day came a dog-team with two men. They saw the party racing up the ice, and all except Endicott watched its approach with interest. A big man ran at the side of the team, and a smaller man clung to the gee-pole. Betty recognised them first.

"Pat!" she shouted. "Pat!"

"Glory be!" came McGuire's answer in a roar.

"It es thet durned Irishman," said Ginger ruefully, recognising that with the coming of the miner his hope of ultimate escape had utterly vanished.

McGuire came into the camp like a boisterous wind. "Halloa, me dear," he cried to Betty. "Safe an' well, I see, the Saints be praised! If they'd let ye go, I'd nivver have burned a candle to thim agin, an' now I'll put up a shrine. An' ye, bhoy?" he cried, turning to Musgrave. "In the pink of delight, hey? Neil bhoy—'tis a pleasure to put eyes on ye, a rale pleasure! But who've ye got here? Ginger Bob—by all that's holy! Well! Well! Here's a merry meeting. Ye're in for the rest cure, I expect. But—but——"

He broke off and looked at Maurice Endicott with startled eyes, then he whistled to himself. "So!" he half whispered. "So! 'Tis the judgment av God!"

Then he turned to Betty again. "But where's that rascal av a father av yours, me dear?"

Betty shook her head. She did not know. No one knew or could make even a guess, except Ginger Bob, and he remained discreetly silent.

That problem indeed remained unsolved, until

they arrived at the McQuestin Mission. As they approached it in the late afternoon a smell of burning reached them, and whilst yet a mile away they came upon a blazing cabin, by the side of which flew the flag of pestilence. A little distance from the cabin stood a small group of people, one of whom was a priest, and at some distance apart stood a nun with bowed head. The priest had a book in his hand, and suddenly McGuire divined what was happening.

"Shure," he whispered, "'tis a funeral! We cannot pass the copse, an' bless God the wind blows the other way."

In silence they waited there until the priest had finished reading the prayers for the dead, and then whilst the cabin roared and blazed, he closed his book and came towards them. The nun still remained with bowed head in her place apart.

"'Tis Père Molineau," said Pat suddenly. "But who's the holy woman?"

"Sister Margot," answered Ligoun quietly.

"Sister Margot! My mother!" cried Betty, starting forward.

But Pat caught her arm. "Stay where ye are, me dear, till we know things. Ye'll see that the other kape away, an' there's pestilence there. Ye've taken risks once, bless ye for ut! but 'tis temptin' Providence to take thim twice. Wait wan li'l minute till we know."

As it happened, the meeting was delayed not one minute, but twelve whole days; for the story that Père Molineau told was this. Sister Margot coming up the great river had stumbled on a man wandering alone, stricken with the pestilence, a man who had been her husband in the years before she came to the North. She had brought him to this hut, had nursed him faithfully, but on the previous night he had died; and now as the rigour of the North

demanded, he had the burial of fire. A hut had been prepared for Sister Margot and she would go there, and dwell apart till all risk of infection was over.

"You will understand the need for that, my child," he said to Betty. "At the Orphanage risks cannot be run, no ! for if the pestilence broke out among the children we could do nothing but burn them as they died. Your mother—I know her story now, though I did not when you came to my mission—understands this, and the plan is of her own making. The hut where she will live is in sight of the Orphanage. It has a pole with a white flag. That flag will give us the news. It will only be changed for the red one if—you understand ? Then another Sister will go to nurse her ; but I pray the Saints to spare us the need ; for we have none so brave as Sister Margot."

"But she must know that I am here !" cried Betty.

"Yes ! Yes !" answered Père Molineau. "And that will help. You shall write, and she will read the letter which will be placed where she will find it. It will bring her joy and hope ; and hope with our prayers will prevail. A little patience and you shall see her, I doubt not."

Every day as soon as it was light, Betty, with Musgrave by her side, went to the point from which the Sister's hut was visible, and every morning to their great relief the white flag flew. Sometimes Sister Margot herself appeared, and waved her hand, and at last came the day when all risk of contagion had passed, and she moved across the snow to meet the daughter for whose sake she had exiled herself for twenty years.

* * * * *

Seven months later Neil Musgrave and his wife were in London, with Pat McGuire as companion,

the business of the mines in which they were interested having taken them there as soon as Musgrave had obtained his release from the Mounted Police. Whilst there Musgrave had an interview with the trustees who paid the allowance for his grandfather's estate—an interview which astonished him.

"Do I understand you to say that I inherit twenty thousand pounds a year?"

"Just that. It was to be yours on your twenty-seventh birthday conditional on your being of sober and regular life, and industriously following some profession and free of debt. You were not to know anything of all this, your grandfather having his own reasons for these secret conditions. Having amassed a great fortune he objected to it's being thrown away in riotous living; as it inevitably would have been if it had gone to the person who ordinarily would have succeeded to it."

"Who was that?" asked Neil quickly.

"Your uncle, the late Major James Andover!"

"Major Andover! My uncle? I never knew," cried the young man, seeing all the past illumined as by some sudden searchlight.

"Possibly not! The late Major Andover's relations were none of them proud of the relationship. Indeed, most of them studiously ignored it."

Half an hour afterwards Neil Musgrave went to find Pat McGuire.

"Come along with me, Pat, I'm going to interview the blackest blackguard in London."

"Then ye'll nade company, me bhoy. But who's the guy, that ye should want to see him?"

"His name is Appleyard, and he can give us the inside of a story of which we both know something."

"Then I'm in. Lade on, McDuff!"

When the clerk announced "two gentlemen to see you, sir," the financier turned in his chair curiously,

then as he caught sight of Musgrave his gross face went suddenly pale. It was a moment before he could find words.

"You, Mr. Musgrave," he stammered, "this is—er—a pleasure."

"I'm glad you find it so," answered the young man tersely. "I want some information from you."

"Information? Certainly, Mr. Musgrave. Anything in my power——"

"Oh, it is in your power," interrupted Musgrave, producing the torn letter in which Endicott had left his message of desertion. "If you have any doubts on the matter this letter of your own will help to remove it."

He held out the letter for the inspection of the financier. As the latter saw it his face grew ghastly, and Musgrave spoke again.

"There is no doubt of the meaning of this little note, I think. Certain events of the past year have made its meaning very clear to me, and an interview I have had recently with the trustees of my late grandfather's estate has given the note a new significance. Now tell me the truth. Endicott and Major Andover went to Canada to—er—play the Ace of Spades on me, didn't they?"

The financier, unable to find words, nodded.

"Andover's interest in the thing I know, Endicott's I can guess at, but yours beats me. What was it?"

"The Major owes me eleven thousand pounds, payable on his succession to his late father's estate. So—so——"

"I see. I was to be got out of the way."

"You were all that stood between him and the estate," explained the financier fearfully, "and so between me and payment. The Major with the help of Endicott first tried to ruin you by making it impossible for you to fulfil the conditions, of

which your uncle was aware. Between them they brought you here hoping to involve you in debt; at the Major's suggestion Endicott induced you to try cocaine—knowing the almost certain course of the drug-eater. When you pulled up and went to Canada, they—er—went also."

"I see. Something more drastic had become necessary?"

The financier nodded, and Musgrave spoke again.

"Well, as you must have realised by this time, they failed."

"Where—where—are they?"

"The Major is dead; and Endicott is in a sanatorium for mental cases in Kent."

"They owe me money——" began Appleyard, and then McGuire was moved to intervene

"Money, ye swine! Money! There's a man in Stony Mountain Penitentiary who was drawn into this dhirty business av yours, doing time for ut an' other things, Ginger Bob, by name! He isn't a saint, but he's an angel av light alongside av ye. Money is ut? Money! I'll give ye money!"

He did—in coin that was not that of the realm; and when at length Neil dragged him out of the half wrecked office, Mr. Jesse Appleyard was the sorest and most penitent man in London

"Ye'll kape ut quiet from the li'l girl, Neil bhoy," said McGuire when they found a taxi "She'll be thinkin' I'm a savage. A discrute silence now——"

"I'll tell her no more than is necessary, though really, McGuire, I think if she had known she would have demanded a box-seat."

"I ain't that sure," said McGuire, looking at his knuckles through his split gloves. "Scenes av violence don't please the dears as they do us. But there, ye'll use your judgmint, I know"

But as events befell, when they arrived at the hotel, Betty had news for them that drove Apple-
yard and his villainies clean out of mind. She met
them with a telegram in her hand, her face radiant
with happiness.

"Guess who is coming?" she cried, and without
giving them time to speak herself supplied the
answer.

"My mother! She landed in Liverpool this
morning and she is on her way now."

"I am very glad to hear it for your sake, Betty.
She has suffered much. We must do our best to
make her happy."

"We will make her as happy as ourselves!"
answered Betty.

"That I think will not be possible," replied her
husband with a smile.

It was McGuire who spoke the last word. "Ye
may spare your worry! A saint like Sister Margot
will bring her own happiness."

And doubtless he was right.

THE END.

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